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BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PERIOD HOMES MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2021

PERIOD LIVING

Comfort & joy

Beautiful homes dressed up for a magical celebration

Taste of Christmas

Traditional bakes & treats to share

MAKE A WREATH USING FORAGED FLORALS

SEASONAL IDEAS

THOUGHTFUL GIFTS

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Decorating the house for Christmas is not just a highlight of the festive period, but of the whole year. For our family, the process feels like a sacred ritual – we each have our own cherished ornaments to hang on the tree; my husband will put up all the lights and I'll make a fresh wreath for the front door. We used to be quite strict about not decorating too early, but like many people last year we were so eager to surround ourselves with festive cheer that we embraced the spirit of the season the moment December arrived. As lockdown made it such a low-key affair, I am hopeful that this year we will all be able to spend quality time with friends and family, and celebrate properly. So, to help you make this Christmas your most magical yet, this special issue is packed with ideas and inspiration.

I always look forward to seeing the beautiful readers' homes in the December issue (from page 40), as they are so wonderfully dressed for the occasion. It makes me smile how often our featured homeowners set Christmas as their deadline for finishing a renovating or decorating project. I've certainly put that pressure on myself in years past, as imagining welcoming guests into your finished home can be a huge motivating factor. It can even influence the overall design, as having enough space to host extended family and friends on special occasions needs to be carefully planned out. As the engine room for cooking up a fabulous feast, the kitchen in particular is at the heart of celebrations, so from page 117 we look at how to create the perfect space, from quick and easy festive frills to major changes to consider in 2022.

Elsewhere, we reveal our favourite Yuletide looks (page 30), and style editor Pippa Blenkinsop serves up *A Very Vintage Christmas* (page 22), which sums up how the season can feel at once nostalgic, stylish and in tune with nature. Plus, let us inspire you to create your own wreath using flowers and foraged foliage (page 142).

Finally, this month don't miss the chance to subscribe to *Period Living* for just £35.99, and receive a free Sophie Allport bundle worth £45.49 (page 50). It's the perfect treat for you or gift for someone special.

Wishing you a very merry Christmas from the whole team!

Melanie Griffiths
Editor, *Period Living*

Illustration Sarah Overs Photograph David Lloyd

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PERIOD LIVING
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Photograph **Brent Darby**
Styling **Pippa Blenkinsop and Karen Darlow**

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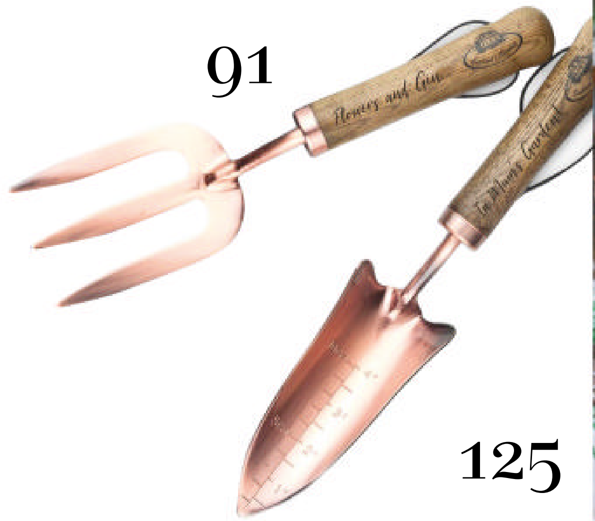

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Your Journal

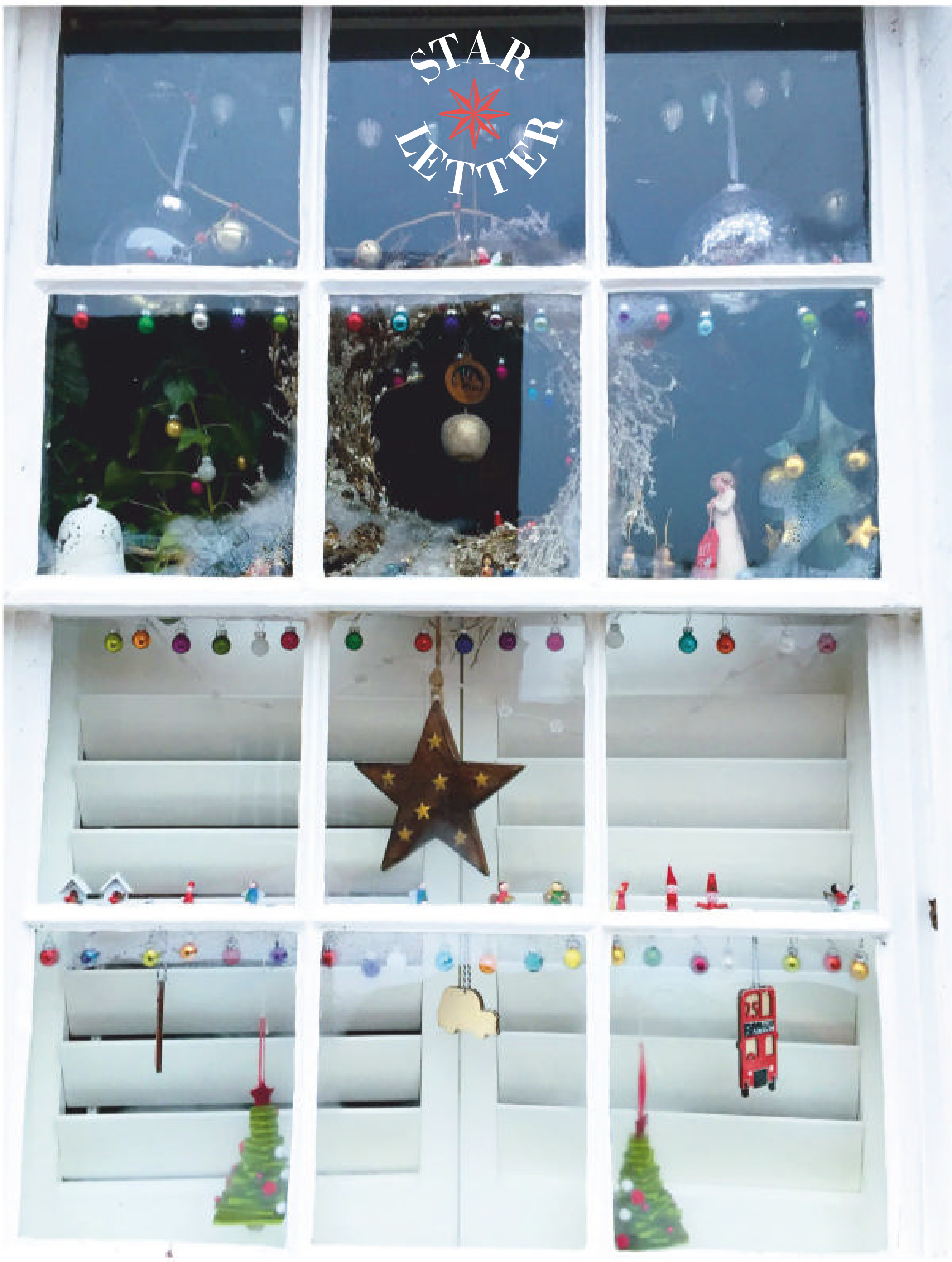
Readers' letters, projects
and views on the magazine

A STITCH IN TIME

I loved reading Alison Miley's column about patchwork quilts in October's *Antiques Journal*. In the piece, she said that 'quilts are a beautiful snapshot of time' and this took me back 50 years to when I was at college, training to become a nursery nurse. Part of our coursework was to make a useful item and I chose to make a quilt (above). I can remember cutting out the materials and arranging the squares, then stitching them together. It was lovely reliving those memories of all those years ago as if it was yesterday. **Jacqui Sutherland**

PUZZLING THOUGHTS

I love doing jigsaw puzzles – they kept me sane during lockdown! While reading the October issue, it occurred to me that many of the beautiful photographs in Period Living would make wonderful jigsaw puzzles. It might be a delightful cottage with rambling roses, a gorgeous kitchen with a dresser full of vintage china, or a dog by the stove. **Jane Brown**



WINDOW DRESSING

Last year, Christmas fell in the middle of the pandemic and I was missing walking around London and seeing the beautiful shop windows. So, I thought I would create something similar at home (above) in the hope that it would make people smile as they passed my house. It definitely did and I received lots of compliments, which made me smile, too. As I enjoyed it so much, I am planning another window display this year. I have some new ideas up my sleeve and hopefully it will continue to spread festive cheer during the Christmas period. May Kharal

This month's star letter writer wins Bettys' Taste of Bettys tin, worth £45, which is filled with sweet treats that are perfect for enjoying on a chilly evening

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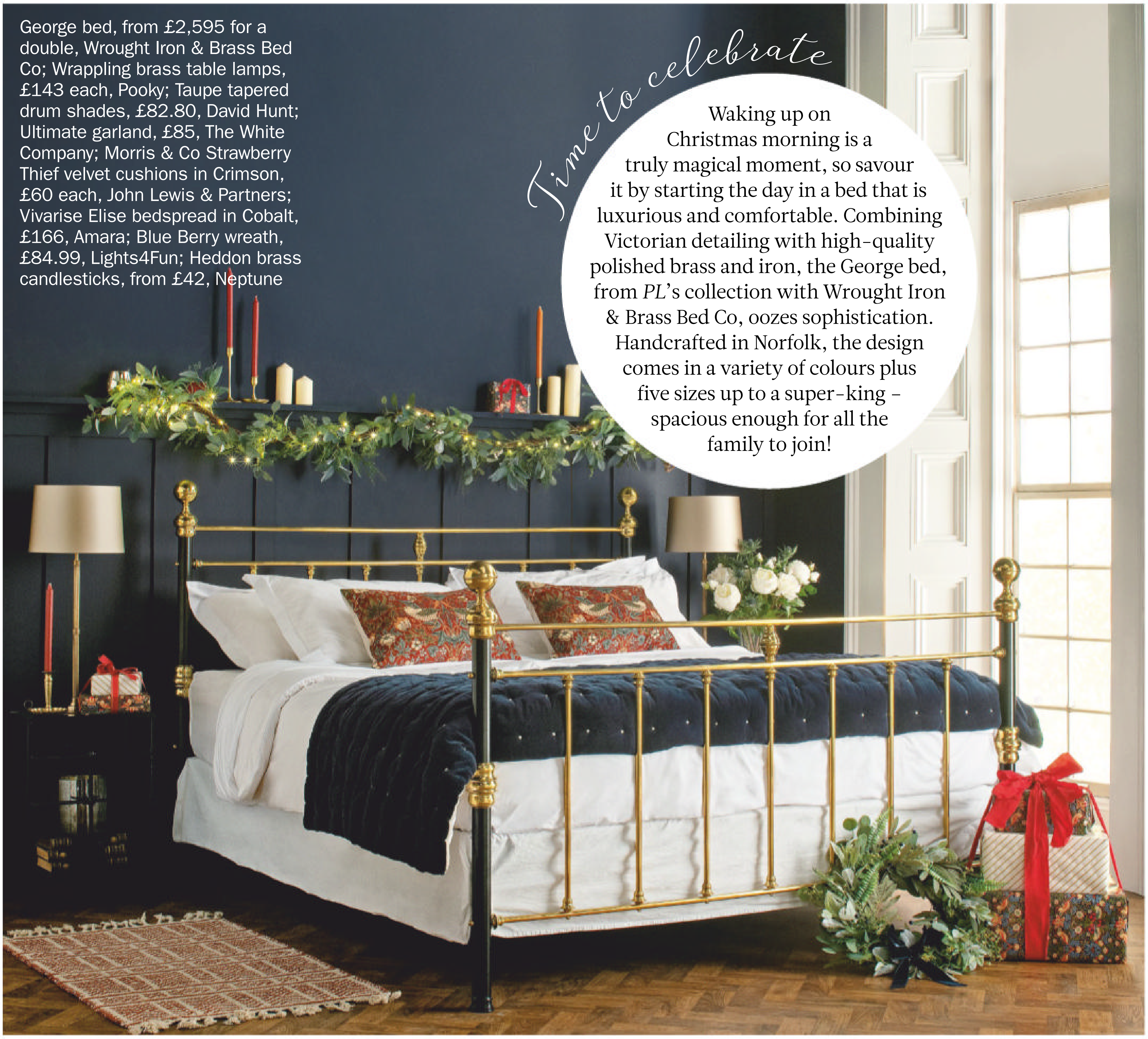
Journal

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop

Prepare for the festive season with these inspiring decorating and handcrafted gift ideas



George bed, from £2,595 for a double, Wrought Iron & Brass Bed Co; Wrappling brass table lamps, £143 each, Pooky; Taupe tapered drum shades, £82.80, David Hunt; Ultimate garland, £85, The White Company; Morris & Co Strawberry Thief velvet cushions in Crimson, £60 each, John Lewis & Partners; Vivarise Elise bedspread in Cobalt, £166, Amara; Blue Berry wreath, £84.99, Lights4Fun; Heddon brass candlesticks, from £42, Neptune

Time to celebrate

Waking up on Christmas morning is a truly magical moment, so savour it by starting the day in a bed that is luxurious and comfortable. Combining Victorian detailing with high-quality polished brass and iron, the George bed, from *PL*'s collection with Wrought Iron & Brass Bed Co, oozes sophistication. Handcrafted in Norfolk, the design comes in a variety of colours plus five sizes up to a super-king – spacious enough for all the family to join!

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SIP IN STYLE

Bring Morris magic to Christmas entertaining with Spode's new Morris & Co teaware. With Spode marking its 250th anniversary this year, and Morris & Co its 160th, the new collection is the perfect celebration of the iconic brands' joint heritage. Covered in archive Morris & Co prints including Honeysuckle, Golden Lily, Pomegranate and Blackthorn, pieces range from a beautiful tea pot, £65, and a tiered cake stand, £55, to a set of four pretty pastry forks, £18.50 – a perfect stocking filler.

Priscilla Prestige angel tree topper, £95, Paper Sam

Pair of hanging ceramic angels £190, Not on the High Street

Little Angel decoration, £18.80, Halinka's Fairies

ANGEL TRAIL

Lift spirits this Christmas with one of these beautifully handcrafted celestial decorations

Winter wanderings

If you're looking for a day out over the holidays then don't miss the Winter Festival at the newly reopened Museum of the Home, which promises to be a celebration of the many events that punctuate the winter months. From Diwali and Hanukkah to Lunar New Year, a range of festivals will be marked in different ways across the site, from a major light installation on the exterior of the building to the much-loved Christmas Past exhibition, which charts how Christmas celebrations have evolved over the years. From 28 October to February 2022.

FESTIVE CRAFT

Create your own beautiful fabric wreath that is kind to the planet and can be enjoyed year after year, with Wallace & Sewell's festive wreath-making kit. Comprising a selection of beautiful wool, silk and mohair ribbons made from offcuts of Wallace & Sewell's British-woven textiles, and a 25cm wire frame to attach them to, the kit, £30, is perfect for a sustainable celebration.

Perfect pairings

Farrow & Ball has teamed up with Liberty to launch an edit of timeless colour and print combinations. Experts from both brands have joined forces to curate a collection that pairs 15 shades from Farrow & Ball's archive with complementary interiors fabrics from Liberty's Modern Collector range. 'I always feel that heritage pattern really comes alive when used with solid colour,' says Genevieve Bennett, head of design interiors at Liberty. 'Pairing our iconic designs with exquisite paint colours such as these really gives the pattern space to breathe and sing.'

Farrow & Ball's Serge, £52 for 2.5ltrs of Estate emulsion, with Liberty's Regency Tulips fabric in Lapis, £130 per m

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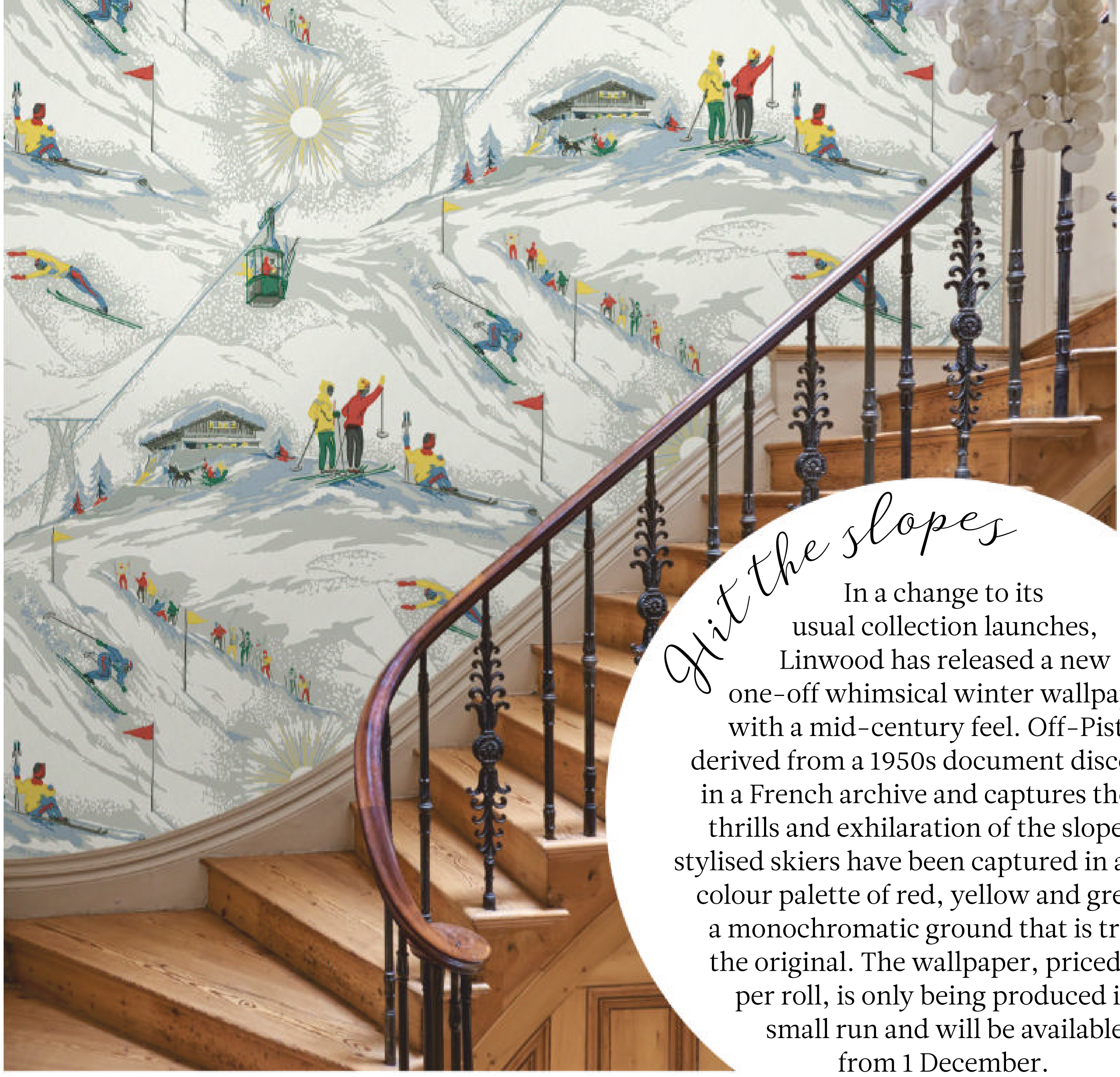
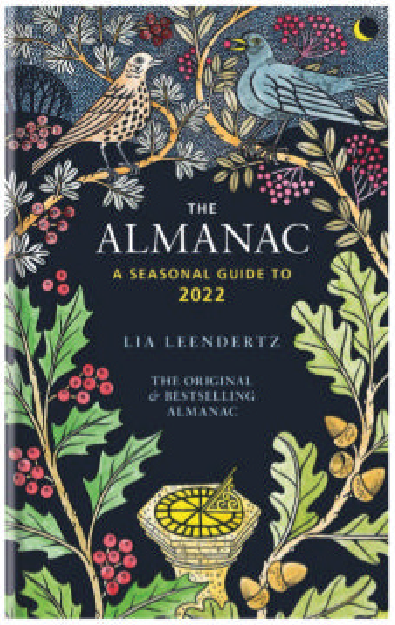


Hit the slopes

In a change to its usual collection launches, Linwood has released a new one-off whimsical winter wallpaper with a mid-century feel. Off-Piste is derived from a 1950s document discovered in a French archive and captures the fun, thrills and exhilaration of the slopes. Its stylised skiers have been captured in a chalky colour palette of red, yellow and green on a monochromatic ground that is true to the original. The wallpaper, priced £119 per roll, is only being produced in a small run and will be available from 1 December.

BOOK SHELF

In an age of uncertainty, take solace in nature with the help of *Almanac: A Seasonal Guide to 2022* by Lia Leendertz (£12.99, Octopus Publishing) – the perfect companion for appreciating the seasons as the year unfolds. Taking the theme of folk celebrations, this is the fifth edition of the best-selling, pocket-sized book, which gives a month-by-month guide to things to mark and notice, from pagan festivals to tidal timetables.

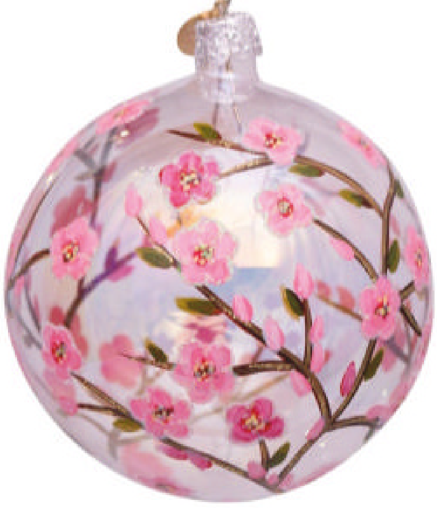


Start the countdown

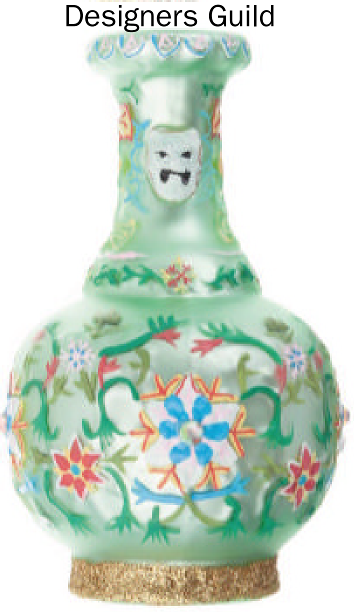
Mark off the days to the 25th and create a cosy festive mood throughout December, with this beautiful handpainted advent candle by Coco Lulu, £45 at Not on the High Street.

MINI TREND CHINOISERIE CHRISTMAS

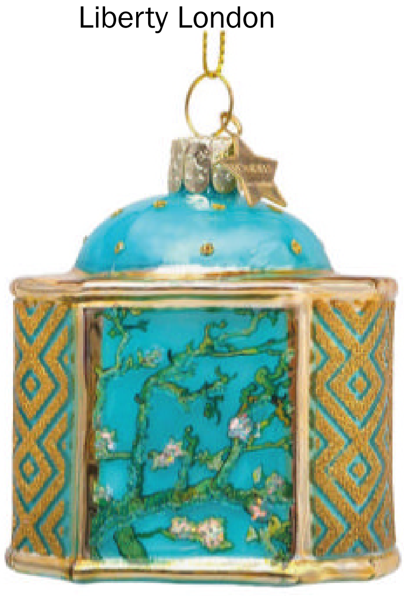
Pink flowers Christmas bauble, £12, Rockett St George



Green Chinoiserie vase decoration, £21, Designers Guild

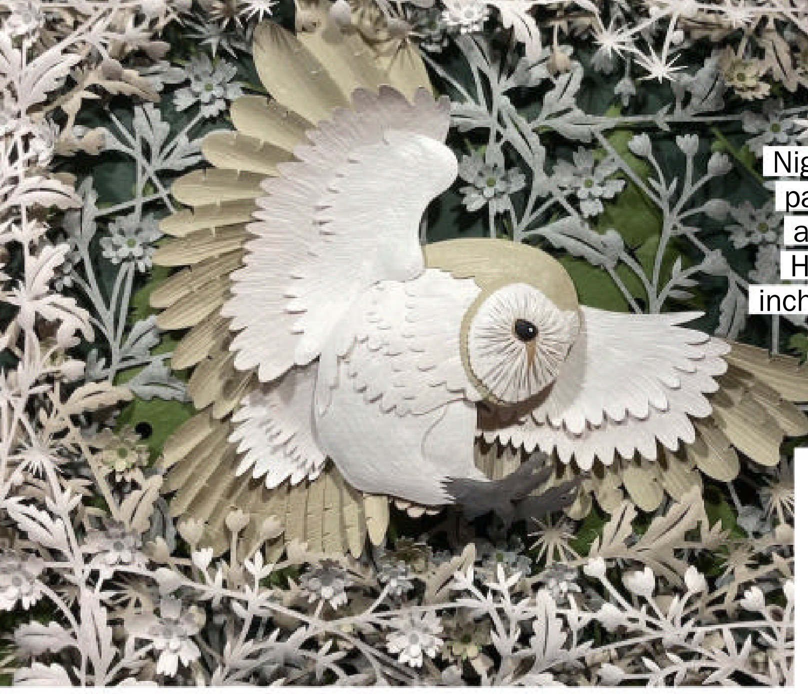


Van Gogh Jar glass tree ornament, £16.95, Liberty London

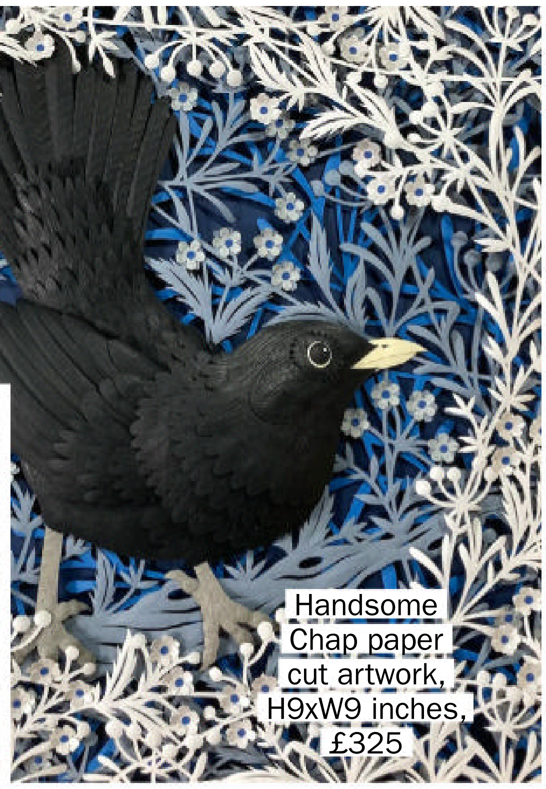


HUNKER DOWN

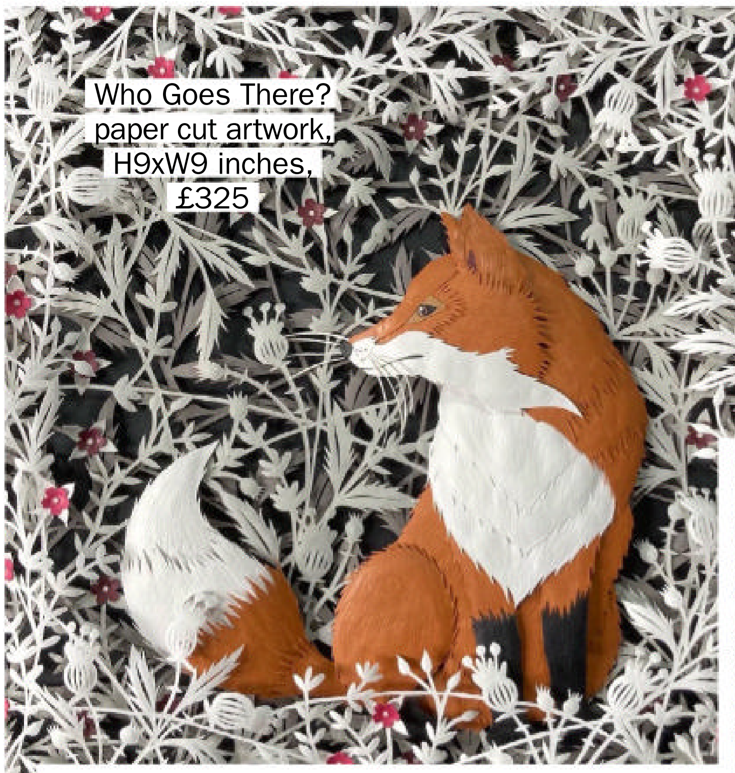
Keep your living room cosy while injecting a warming dose of colour and texture, with a selection of stylish cushions and throws. The Cotswold Company has a wide array to choose from, including velvet cushions in rich Samphire, Copper and Navy tones, from £30, alongside Highland faux sheepskins, £49, and a Sophie Pom Pom throw, £50.



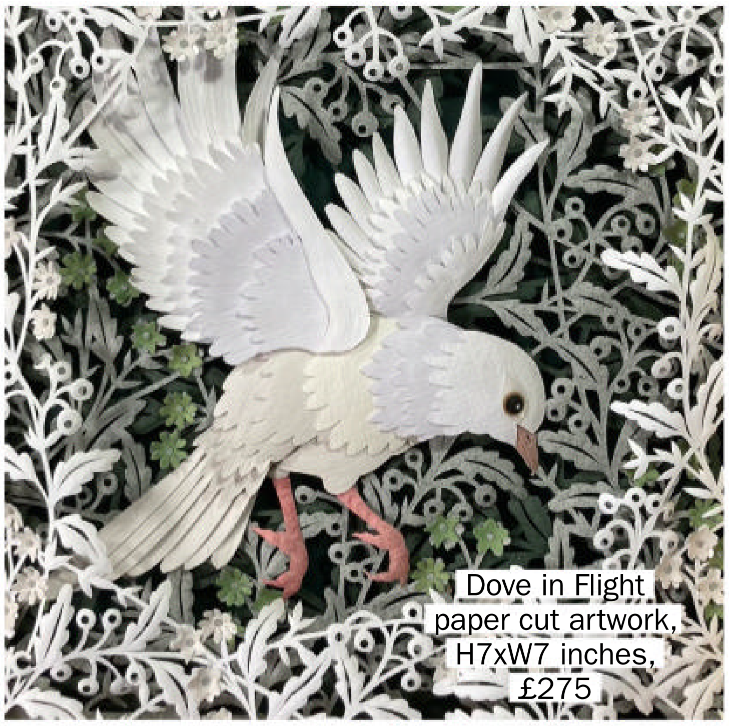
Night Flight paper cut artwork, H8xW10 inches, £350



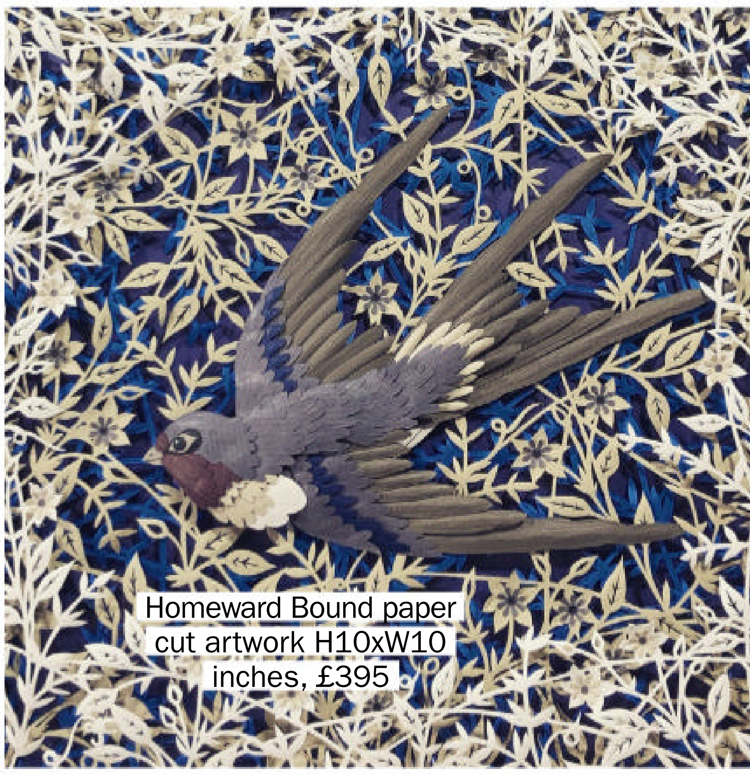
Handsome Chap paper cut artwork, H9xW9 inches, £325



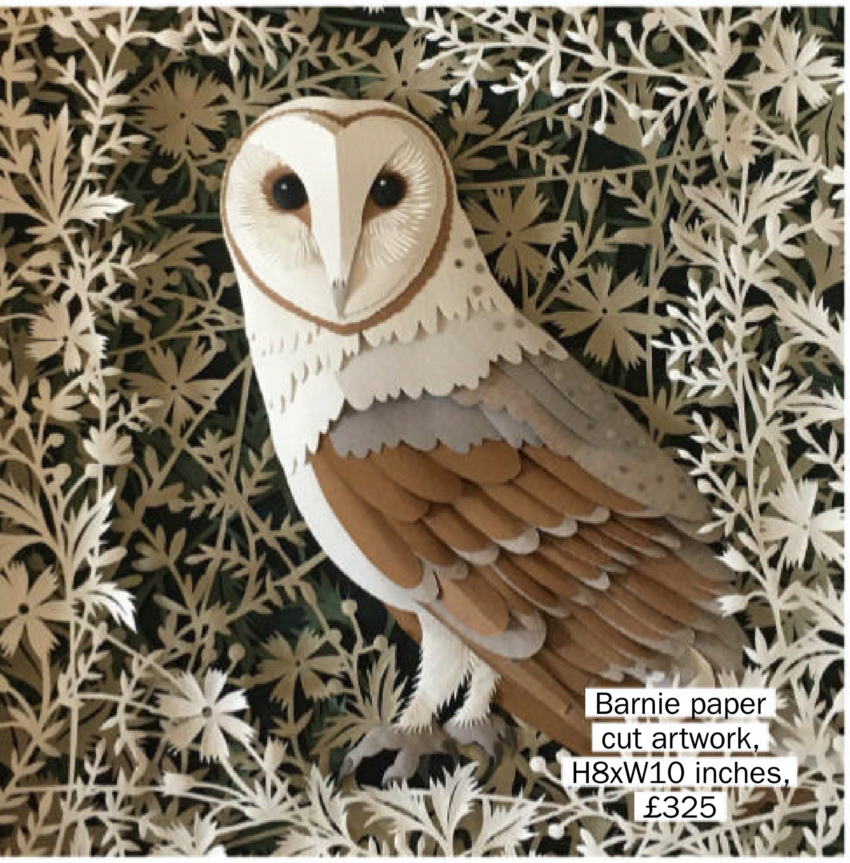
Who Goes There? paper cut artwork, H9xW9 inches, £325



Dove in Flight paper cut artwork, H7xW7 inches, £275



Homeward Bound paper cut artwork H10xW10 inches, £395



Barnie paper cut artwork, H8xW10 inches, £325

TALENT SPOT

Anna Cook

From beady-eyed blackbirds and swooping swallows, to owls preparing to pounce and sly forest foxes, paper artist Anna Cook brings to life a menagerie of charismatic creatures from the most basic of materials. Taking sometimes weeks to create, her beautiful three-dimensional artworks feature animals carefully crafted from layers of individually hand-cut tonal papers framed by thickets of intricately hand-cut paper hedgerow plants and flowers. 'Paper is such a simple, cheap and versatile medium so I go where my imagination takes me; the possibilities are pretty much endless,' says Anna about the appeal of crafting with paper.

Having been creative from a young age, it was while working at a picture framers that Anna, based in York, first became interested in paper art. 'Customers would bring in really delicate, traditional Chinese paper cut scenes and I was struck by how beautifully crafted they were. I suppose I just thought I'd try my hand at it; the first results were very dubious,' she admits. Six years on and Anna has refined her skills, and what started as a hobby has turned into a blossoming business, which allows her to fuse creative talent with her love of nature.

Indeed her creative process often begins with a walk in the countryside, whether it's to gather flowers for reference or to observe animal behaviours. 'While I don't consider myself a wildlife artist as such, I just love watching how birds twitch around in the undergrowth and I wanted to replicate this,' she says. 'I try to capture the personalities of the subjects in their natural habitat.' Once she has decided on a subject, Anna will then make precise drawings to cut from, 'or the cutting goes very wrong, very quickly,' she says. The scalpel is her primary tool, but she also uses embossing and curling tools to give her scenes depth and movement, as well as making use of variations in paper tones. 'I lose myself to many hours of work and get obsessed with the extra detail and colour.'

While the process is very labour intensive, as ironically 'there are no cutting corners' when it comes to creating paper cut artwork, the stunning results are true treasures guaranteed to bring a lifetime of delight, whether a treat for yourself or a thoughtful gift for a loved one. (annacookpaperart.co.uk)

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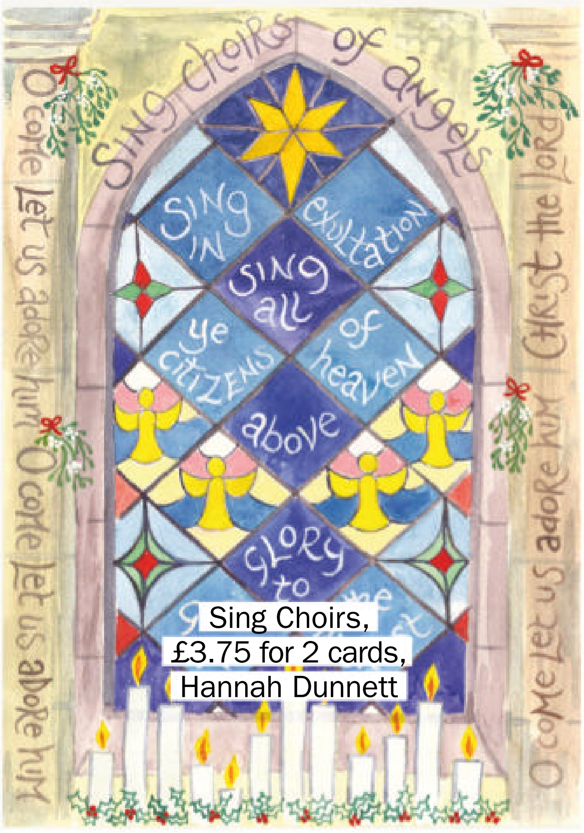
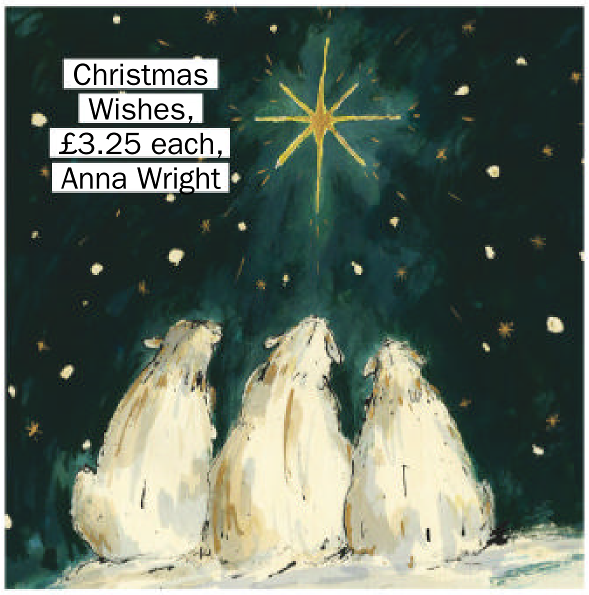
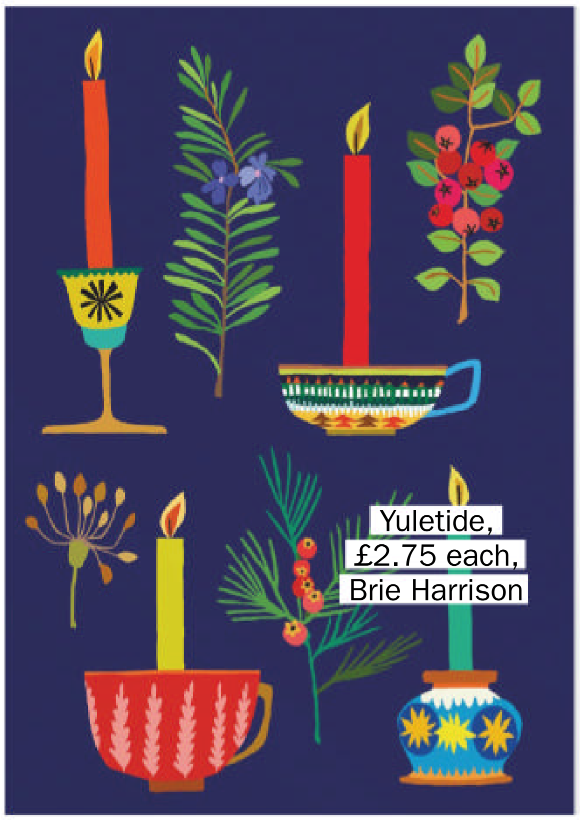

Sing choirs of angels
Sing in exultation
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above
Glory to
O come let us adore him
Christ the Lord

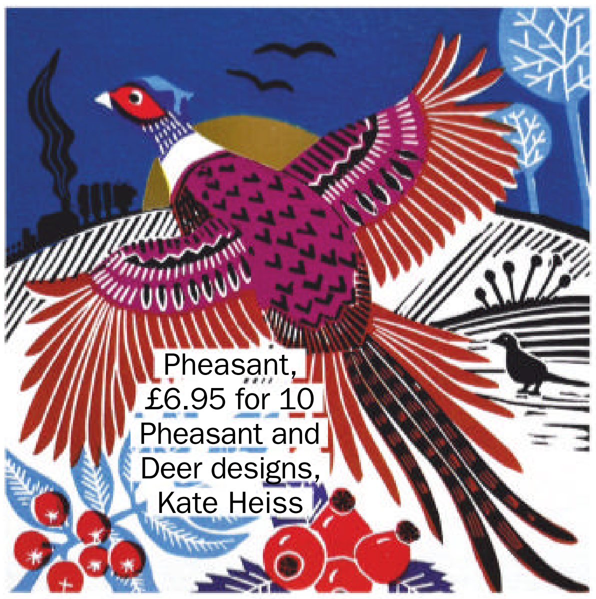
Sing Choirs, £3.75 for 2 cards, Hannah Dunnett



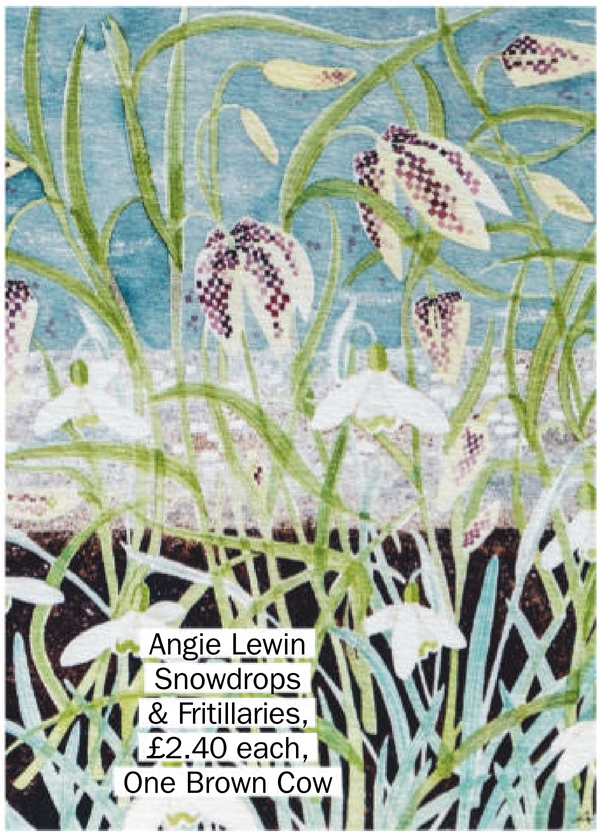
Christmas Wishes, £3.25 each, Anna Wright



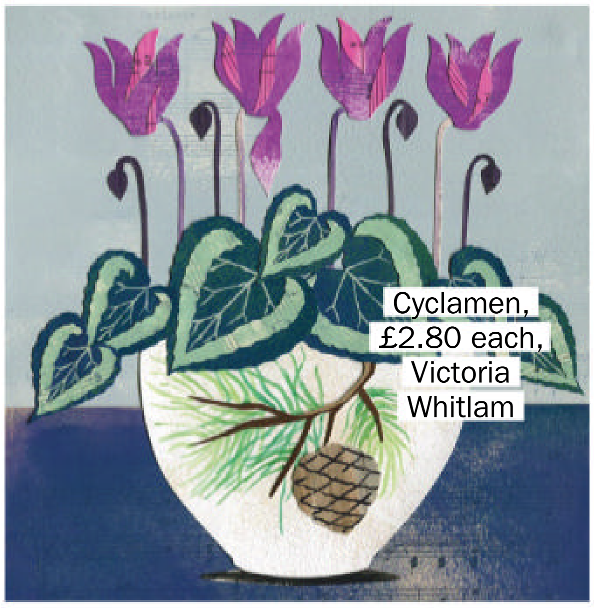
Yuletide, £2.75 each, Brie Harrison



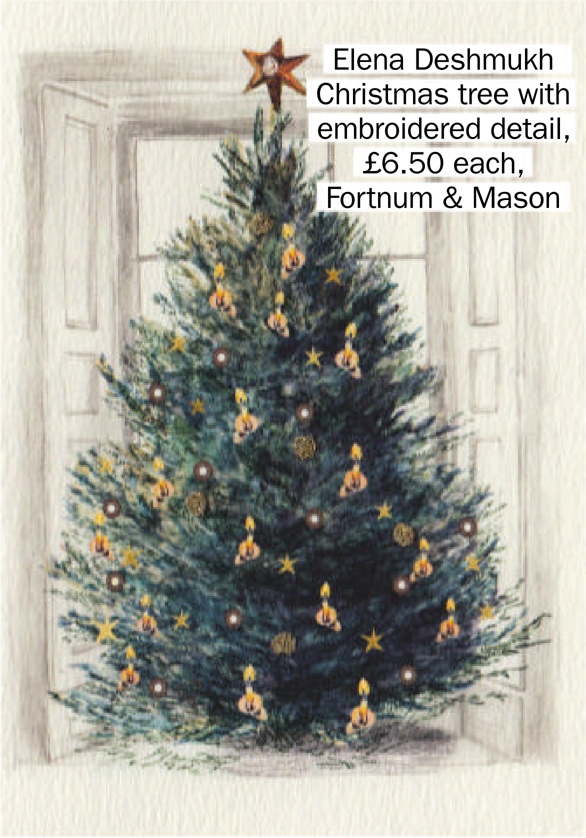
Pheasant, £6.95 for 10 Pheasant and Deer designs, Kate Heiss



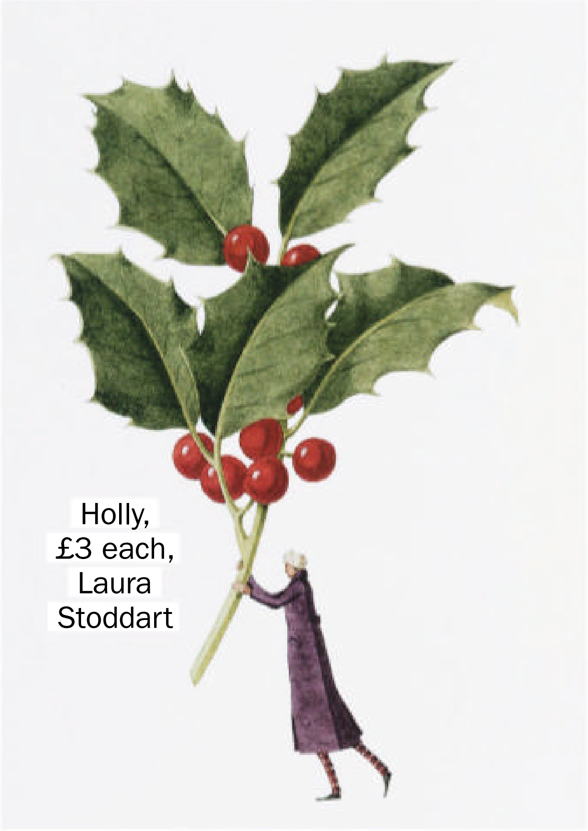
Angie Lewin Snowdrops & Fritillaries, £2.40 each, One Brown Cow



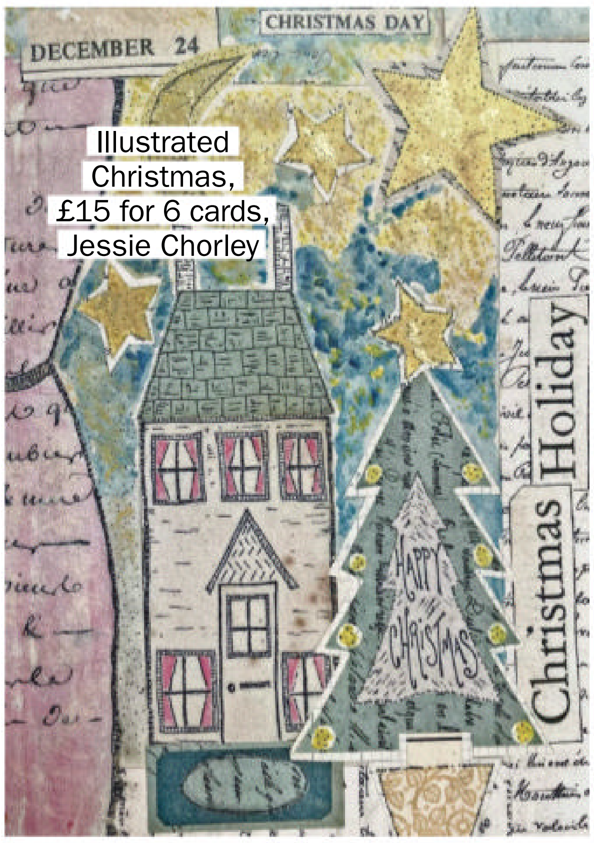
Cyclamen, £2.80 each, Victoria Whitlam



Elena Deshmukh Christmas tree with embroidered detail, £6.50 each, Fortnum & Mason



Holly, £3 each, Laura Stoddart

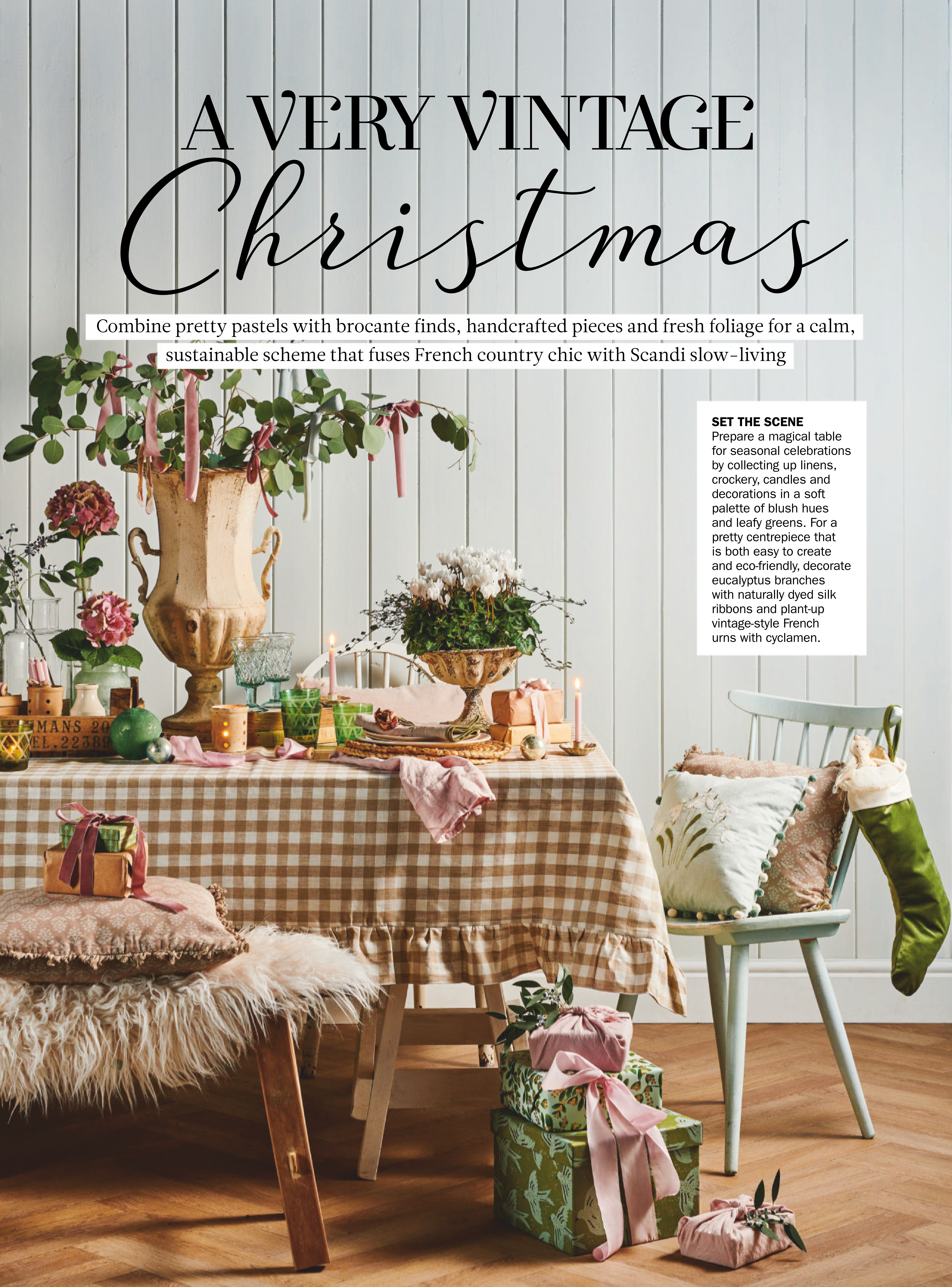

DECEMBER 24
CHRISTMAS DAY
HAPPY CHRISTMAS
Christmas Holiday

Illustrated Christmas, £15 for 6 cards, Jessie Chorley

Feature Holly Reaney

A VERY VINTAGE Christmas

Combine pretty pastels with brocante finds, handcrafted pieces and fresh foliage for a calm, sustainable scheme that fuses French country chic with Scandi slow-living



SET THE SCENE
Prepare a magical table for seasonal celebrations by collecting up linens, crockery, candles and decorations in a soft palette of blush hues and leafy greens. For a pretty centrepiece that is both easy to create and eco-friendly, decorate eucalyptus branches with naturally dyed silk ribbons and plant-up vintage-style French urns with cyclamen.

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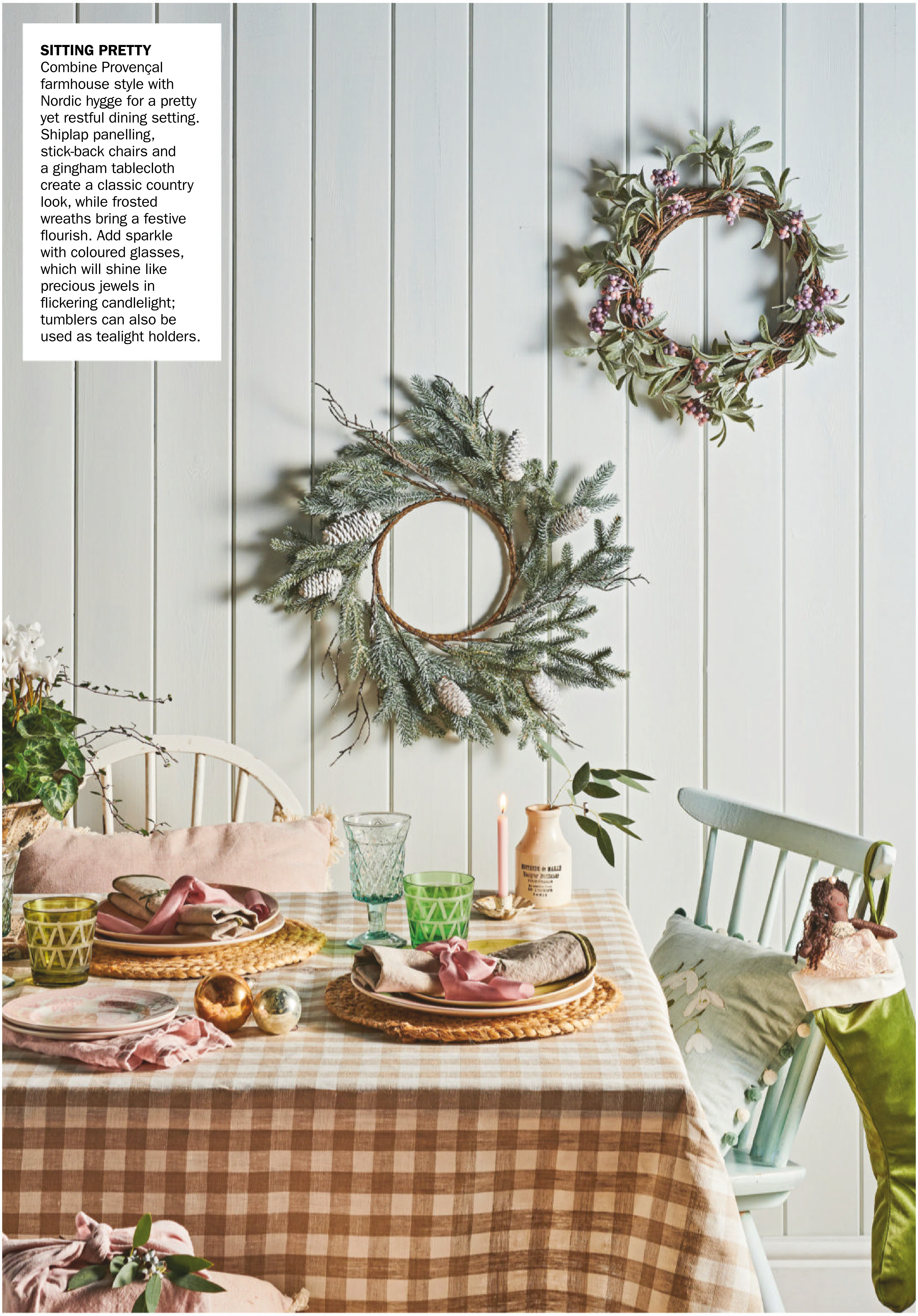
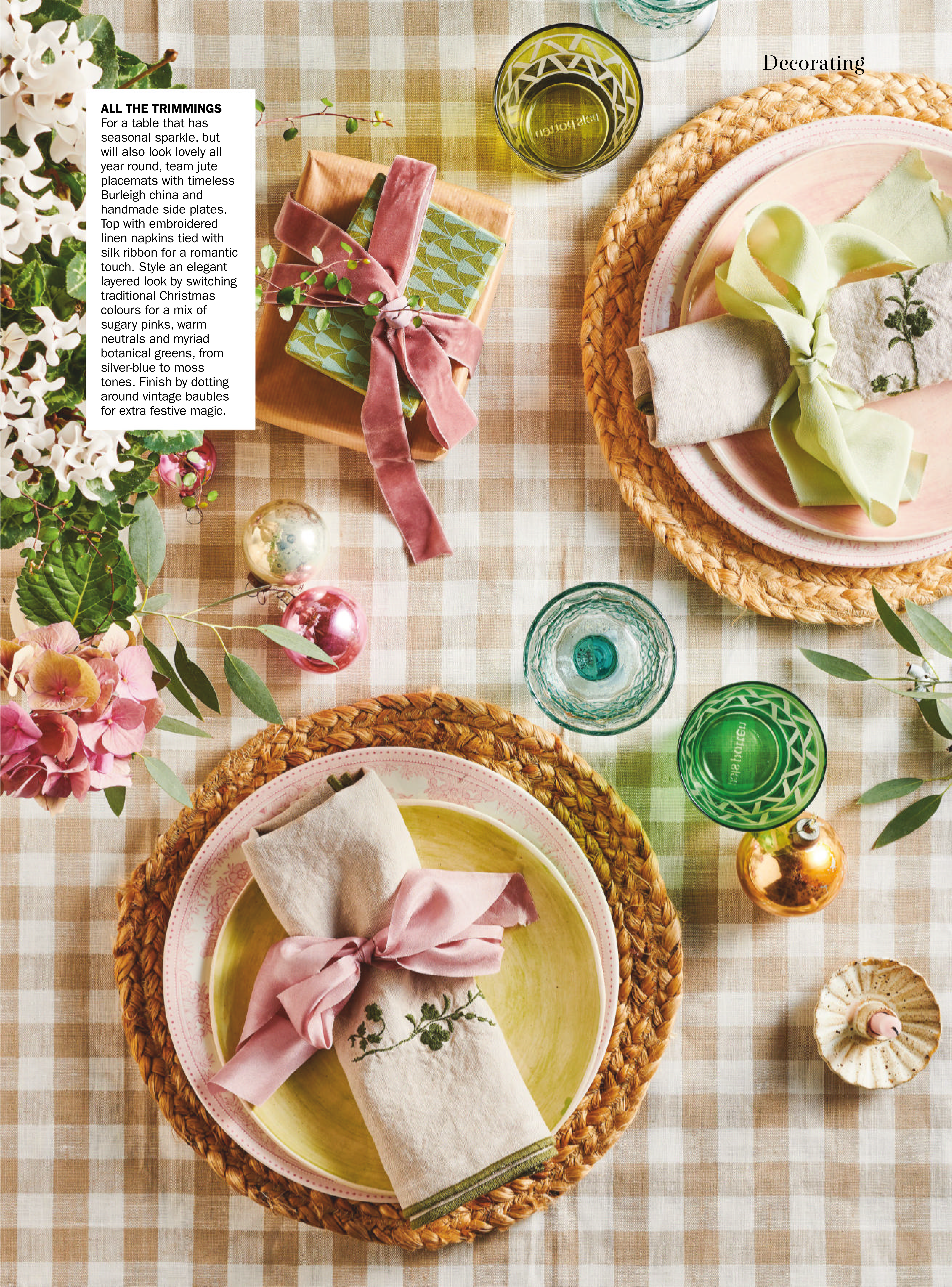
GATHER TOGETHER
Take a sustainable approach to decorating by opting for a simple scheme of candlelight, fresh greenery, and cherished antiques. Scour fleamarkets and vintage shops for rustic vessels to display foraged foliage, from Indian metal lassi cups to French stoneware marmalade jars and recycled glass bottle vases. Accent the look with candles, ribbons and floral touches in dusky pink tones.

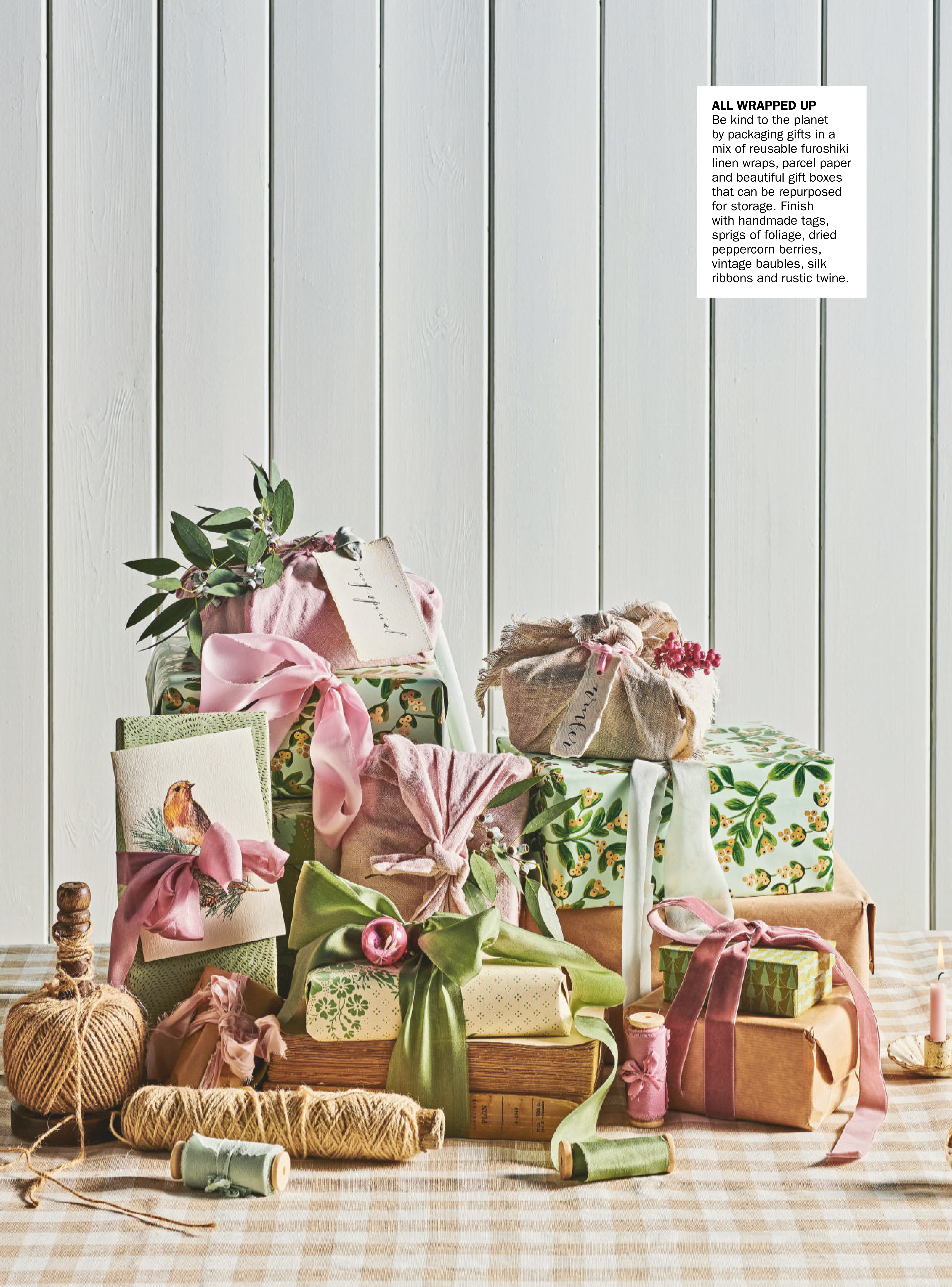
Words and styling Pippa Blenkinsop Photographs Neil Godwin



SITTING PRETTY
Combine Provençal farmhouse style with Nordic hygge for a pretty yet restful dining setting. Shiplap panelling, stick-back chairs and a gingham tablecloth create a classic country look, while frosted wreaths bring a festive flourish. Add sparkle with coloured glasses, which will shine like precious jewels in flickering candlelight; tumblers can also be used as tealight holders.



ALL THE TRIMMINGS
For a table that has seasonal sparkle, but will also look lovely all year round, team jute placemats with timeless Burleigh china and handmade side plates. Top with embroidered linen napkins tied with silk ribbon for a romantic touch. Style an elegant layered look by switching traditional Christmas colours for a mix of sugary pinks, warm neutrals and myriad botanical greens, from silver-blue to moss tones. Finish by dotting around vintage baubles for extra festive magic.



ALL WRAPPED UP
Be kind to the planet by packaging gifts in a mix of reusable furoshiki linen wraps, parcel paper and beautiful gift boxes that can be repurposed for storage. Finish with handmade tags, sprigs of foliage, dried peppercorn berries, vintage baubles, silk ribbons and rustic twine.

FESTIVE FLOURISHES
Decorating with vintage and handcrafted pieces brings character but also supports small traders and artisans, and keeps Christmas plastic-free. Antique glass baubles have unique patinas that bring sparkle and texture, while handmade treasures, such as Debra Thompson's snowdrop wreath, will bring joy year after year and can be passed down through the generations.

PAGE 22 *On table from left*: For pieces in tray see below; Gingham ruffle **tablecloth**, £189, Rebecca Udall; Green Yuri **bauble**, £8, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; vintage **bauble**, stylist's own; large French metal **urn** with handles, £95, Heavenly Homes & Garden; Petal Pink velvet **ribbon**, £8 for 5m, Rowen & Wren; naturally dyed 2-inch silk **ribbon**, from £10 for 2m, CFleurs Design; hand-dyed 5cm silk **ribbon**, £7.50 for 5m, Heirloom Silk (all on branches); antique French cheese strainer (used as **tealight holder**), £10, and **vintage books**, £40, both C'est Tout; Nkuku etched **wine glasses**, £39.95 for 4, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; Pols Potten Tie Up **tumblers**, £85 for 4, Amara; Florence **candle holder**, £12, Rowen & Wren; mini taper **candle** in Powder Pink, 58p each, Greige; jute **placemats**, £6 each, Burford Garden Company; for similar pink linen **napkin**, try Also Home; antiqued metal **centrepiece**, £49, Greige; **cyclamen** and **muehlenbeckia**, £25, Burford Garden Company; **candle holder and candles** both as before. **Chairs**, stylist's own; (on back chair) pale rose **cushion**, £42, Susie Watson Designs; (on chair, right) embroidered snowdrop **cushion**, £48, and Rustic Megha cushion in Dusky Mauve, £45, Susie Watson Designs; velvet green **stocking**, £3, Hobbycraft; handmade angel **doll**, £25, Rosablue; recycled teak **bench**, £160, The Department of Hope, Joy & Wonder; for similar **sheepskin** try Cox & Cox; Rustic Megha **cushion** as before; mini green **gift box**, £4, Burford Garden Company; velvet ribbon as before. *On floor*: Bungalow Green birds **gift box**, £24, Burford Garden Company. For other gifts see right.

PAGE 23 *From left*: Petra green glass **bauble**, £8, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; small vintage bauble, stylist's own. Old French marmalade **jars**, large, £12, and medium, £8, both C'est Tout; dried pink **peppercorns**, £10, Burford Garden Company; candle, as before; vintage **crate**, £15, **books**, £15, cheese strainer, as before, and French mustard pot, £25 all C'est Tout; vintage lassi **cups**, £28 each, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; Summer green stripe handpainted **dinner candles**, £4.25 each, Susie Watson Designs; tall recycled bottle **vase**, £42, Rowen & Wren; vintage glass vase, stylist's own; urn and baubles, as before; cotton **gift bag**, £4 for 5, The Danes; calligraphy gift tag, Edie Rose; bauble and **scissors** stylist's own.

PAGE 24 *From left*: **Urn and glasses** as before; for table setting see details for page 25; vintage French mustard pot, as before; frosted white pinecone **wreath** and frosted purple berry wreath, both £35, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; angel **doll** as before.

PAGE 25 Placemats, as before; Pink Asiatic Pheasants 25cm **dinner plates**, £19 each, Burleigh; Wonki-ware **side plates** in green and pink, £10 each, Burford Garden Company; Lo de Manuela embroidered **napkins** in Acacia Green, £28 each, Amara; hand-dyed silk **ribbons**, from a selection at CFleurs Design.

PAGE 26 Furoshiki linen **cloth gift wrap** in Blush Pink and Natural, from £11.50 for 45cm square, The Danes; Bungalow long green **gift box**, at Burford Garden Company; Elena Deshmukh Robin **card**, £6.50, Fortnum & Mason; Rifle Paper Co Mistletoe Mint **gift wrap**, £9 per roll, Burford Garden Company; large white calligraphy tag, £6.50, Rosehip; small calligraphy tag, £3, Edie Rose Ashley; wallpaper used as gift wrap (on top of books) Anna-Lisa in Gräs Grön, £103 per roll, Astrid & Rudolph; vintage books, as before; string ball on spool, stylist's own; vintage wool **spool**, £2.50, C'est Tout; silk and velvet ribbons as before.

PAGE 27 Linen **tablecloth**, £100, Burford Garden Company. *Clockwise from top left*: Wonki-Ware side plate, as before; handmade **Snowdrop wreath** made using wire, cloth, thread and paint, £45, Debra Thompson Designs; Naturally dyed silk ribbons, from a selection at CFleurs Designs; Green Regal Peacock 17.5cm plate, £18, Burleigh; vintage baubles, stylist's own; Wonki-ware large **cake plate**, £65, Burford Garden Company; dinner plate, as before; Dark Green round glass bauble, £9, Heavenly Homes & Gardens; glass bird decoration, £4.95, Burford Garden Company; Leaves and Berries wreath decoration, £22, Greige. PL

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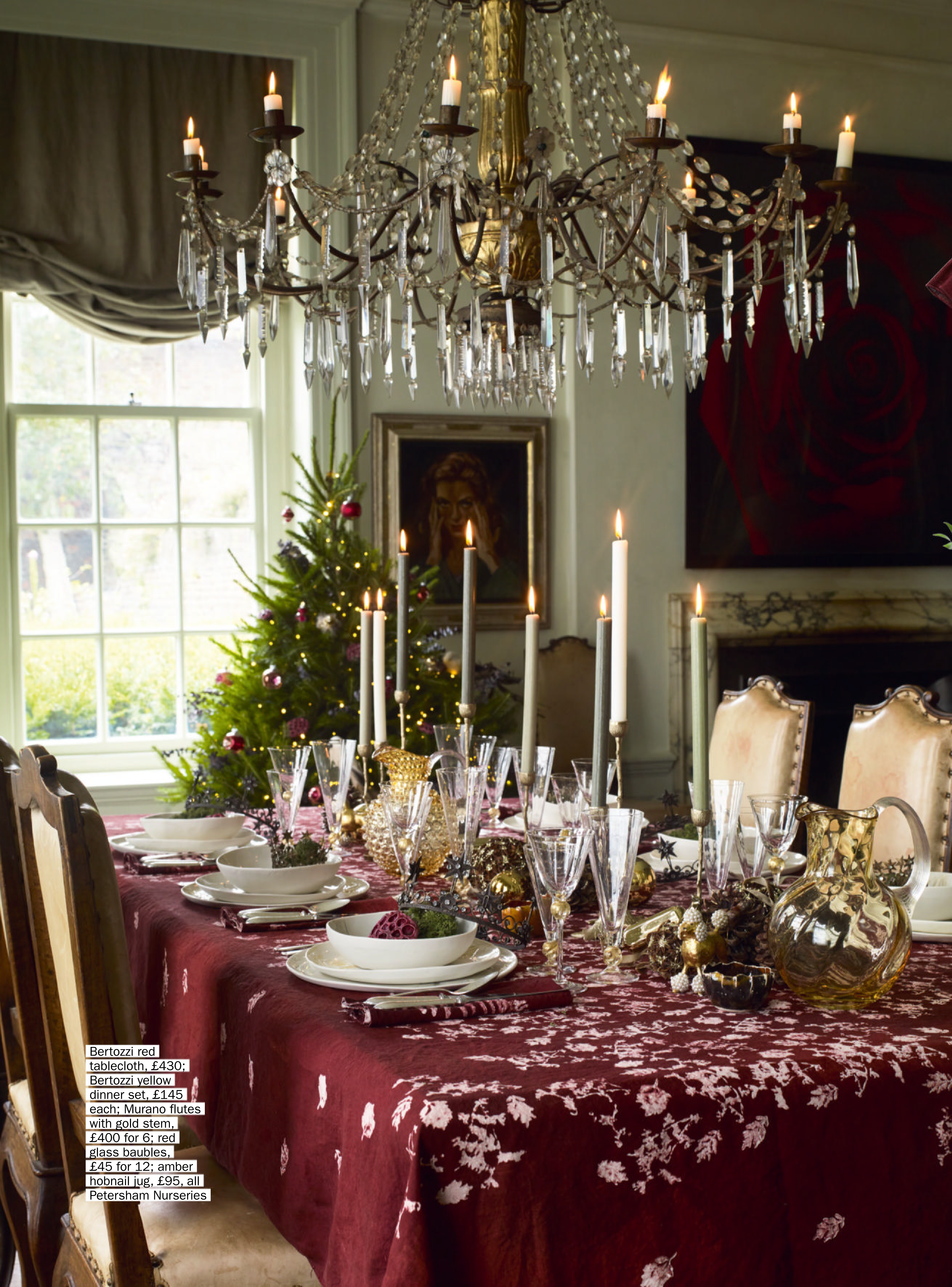


Bertozzi red tablecloth, £430; Bertozzi yellow dinner set, £145 each; Murano flutes with gold stem, £400 for 6; red glass baubles, £45 for 12; amber hobnail jug, £95, all Petersham Nurseries

Traditional luxury

Give festivities a regal air with a scheme of rich rubies, deep burgundies and glistening golds

Ruffle Irish linen napkin in Burgundy, £24, Rebecca Udall

Embroidered red snowflake decoration, £25, Fortnum & Mason

Gold floral hanging decoration, £9.50, Quince & Cook

Festive field berry onion bauble, £8, John Lewis & Partners

Red and gold owl ornament, £22.50, Gisela Graham

Leaf brass napkin rings, £32.50, Nkuku

Stag bowl, £79.95, Annabel James

The Desiree bouquet, £35, Bloom & Wild

Brass leaves and berries garland, £25, Rose & Grey

Magnolia decoration, £5, Selfridges & Co

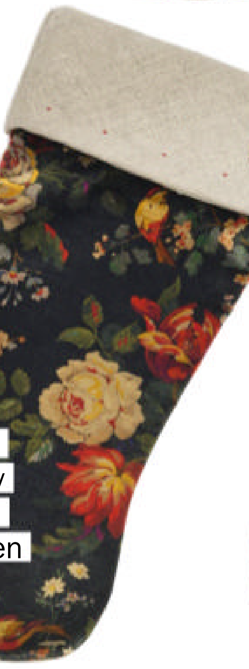
Glitter crown tree topper, £25, Amara

Mistletoe candelabra with small red candles, £50, Raj Tent Club

Pale gold alternative Christmas tree, £65, Ella James

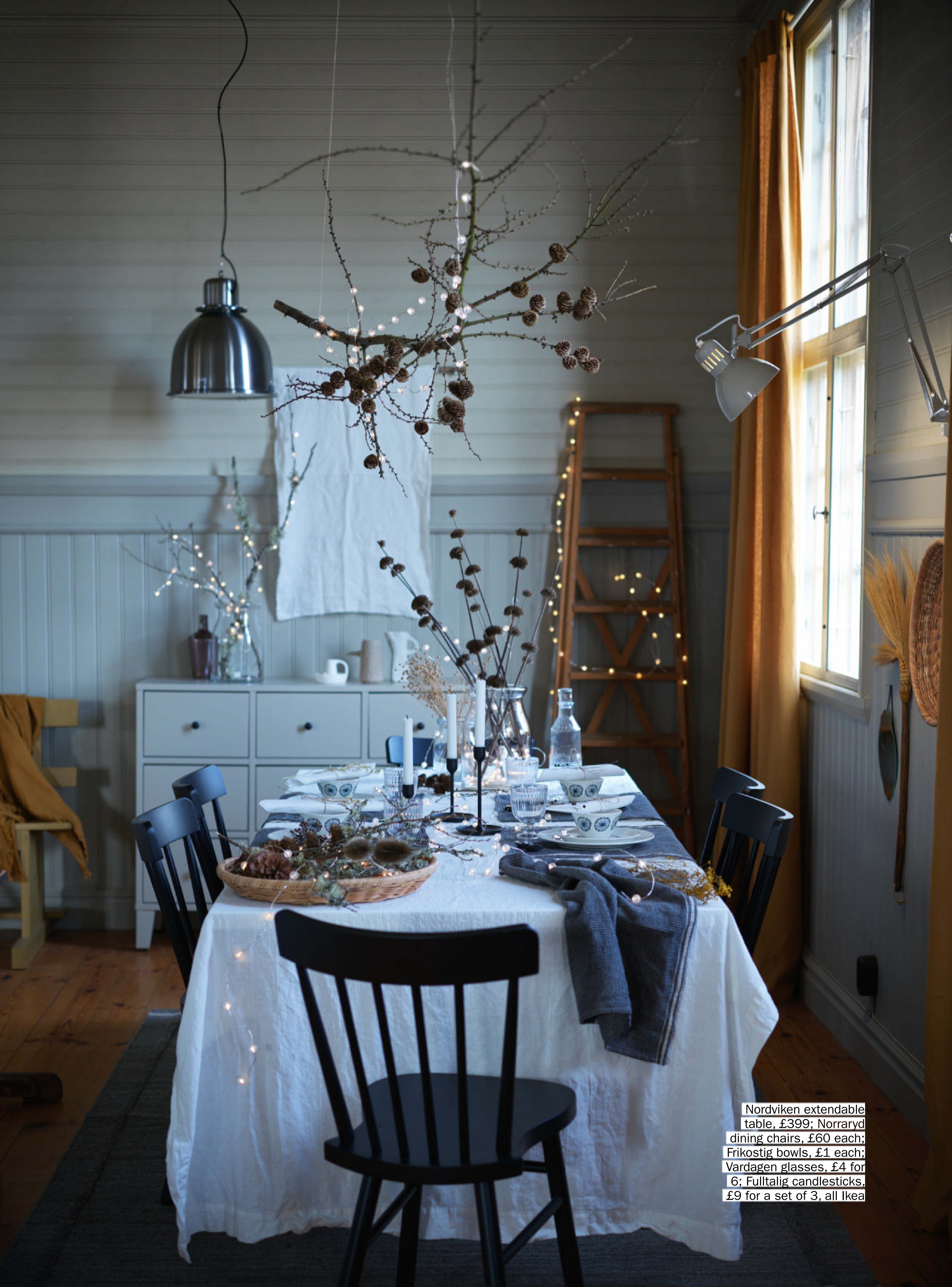
Glass acorn in vintage red, £8.45, Ciel Shop Interiors

Clear bobble jug with gold handle, £155, Sophie Conran


The Night Rose heirloom Liberty velvet stocking, £250, Velvet Linen

Decorative golden pears, £12.95 for 4, Charles Ted

Feature Holly Reaney



Nordviken extendable table, £399; Norraryd dining chairs, £60 each; Frikostig bowls, £1 each; Vardagen glasses, £4 for 6; Fulltalig candlesticks, £9 for a set of 3, all Ikea

Nordic Noël

Channel a rustic Scandi scheme full of hygge magic. Think glowing candlelight, cosy home textiles and winter foliage

Blue Stars cushion cover, £39, JJ Textile

Scandi-style chevron Christmas stocking, £36.50, Heavenly Homes & Gardens

Nordic angel decorations, £6 for the pair, Gisela Graham

Midwinter garland, £34.99, Lights4Fun

Winter Spice soya wax candle, £32, Rebecca Tracey

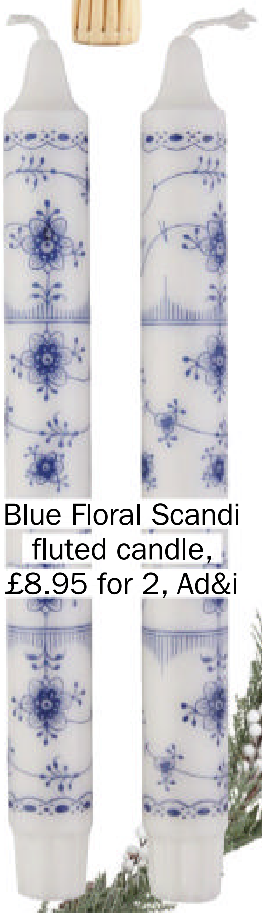
REBECCA TRACEY
Spice
BOTANICAL CANDLE
07

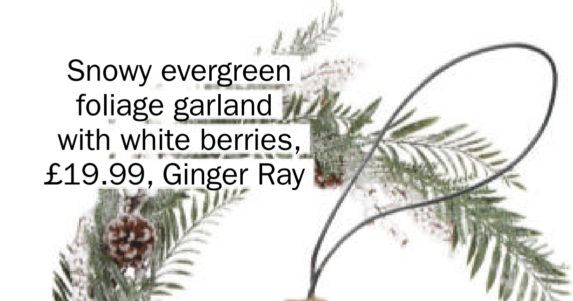
Small Maro brass lantern, £19.50, Nkuku

Rattan tree topper, £14.50, Cox & Cox

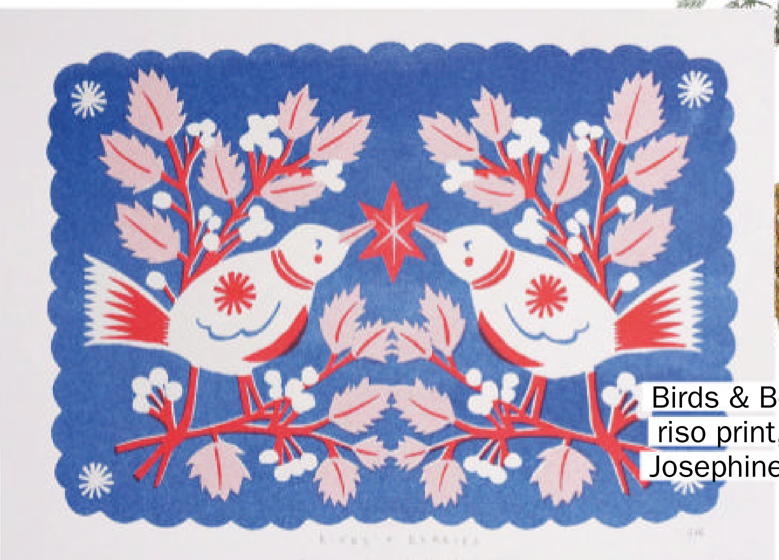
Christmas breakfast plate and bowl set, £28.95, Artisan Homeware

Nordic artificial Christmas tree, H150cm, £58, Beaumonde


Blue Floral Scandi fluted candle, £8.95 for 2, Ad&i


Snowy evergreen foliage garland with white berries, £19.99, Ginger Ray

Recycled cotton paper tree ornament in Caramel, £5.95, Rose & Grey


Birds & Berries A5 riso print, £8, Jeff Josephine Designs

Wilder Badger cushion, £34.99, Perkins & Morley

Tana stonewashed throw in Ochre, £74, Abode Living

Mini metal mistletoe decorations, £12 for 12, The White Company

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop

18+

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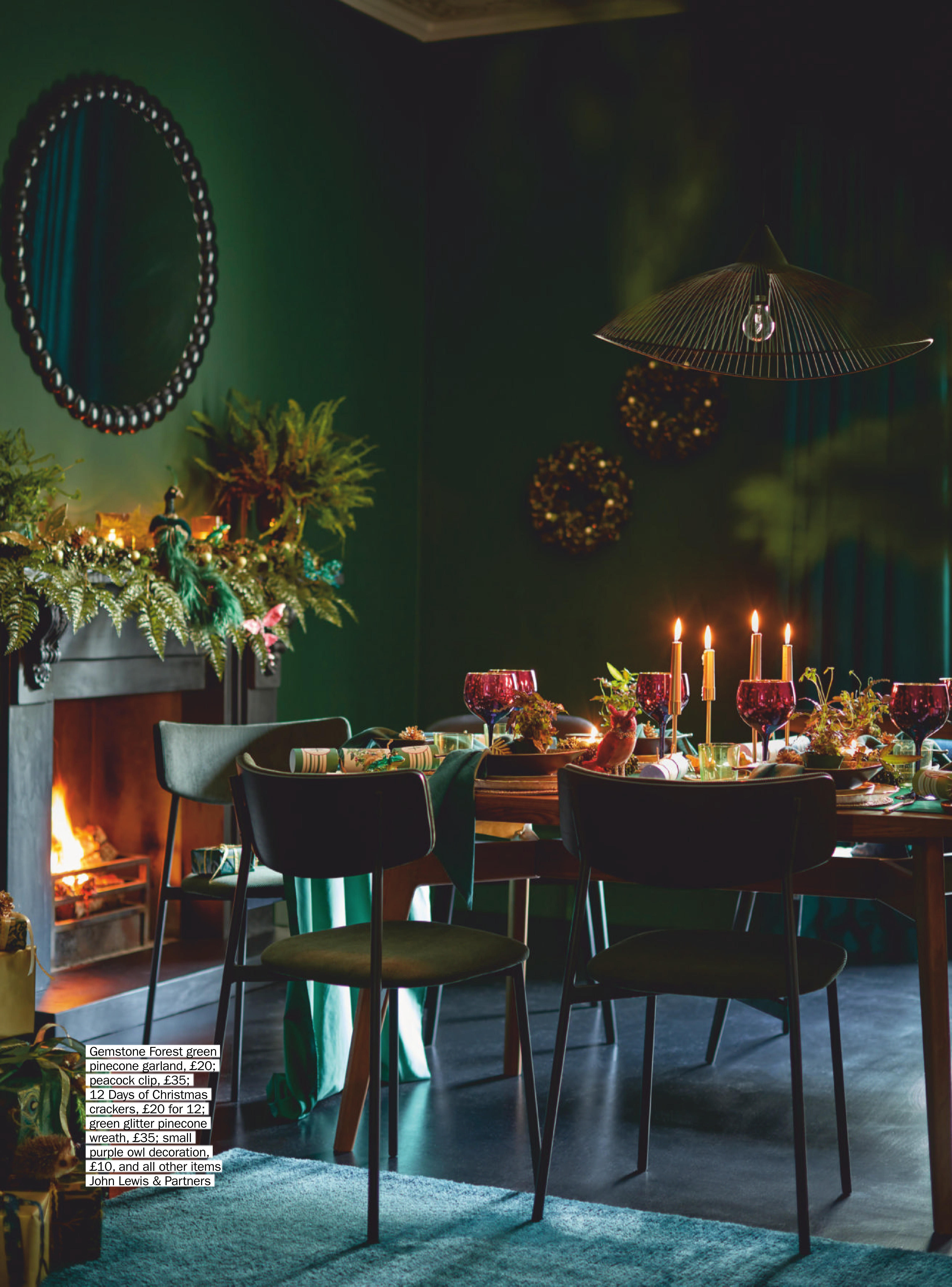
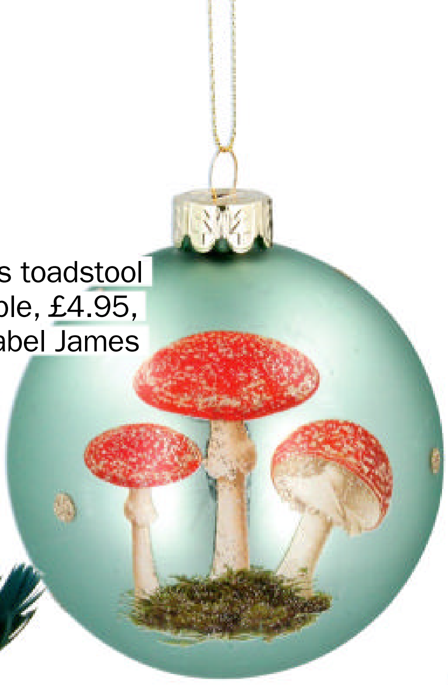


Gemstone Forest green pinecone garland, £20; peacock clip, £35; 12 Days of Christmas crackers, £20 for 12; green glitter pinecone wreath, £35; small purple owl decoration, £10, and all other items John Lewis & Partners

Jewel garden

Combine nature-inspired pieces with gemstone colours and metallics for a vibrant scheme full of shimmer

Feather bird clips, £3 each, V&A Shop


Glass toadstool bauble, £4.95, Annabel James

Glass green butterfly, £13.99, Dobbies

Pomegranate and quince baubles, £33 for the pair, Petersham Nurseries

ASD Loire purple wine glasses, £8.70 each, Not Just Jugs

Beaded beetle decorations, £12 each, Raj Tent Club

Green stripe stocking, £32, Sophie Conran

Gold leaf glass robin bauble, £5.99, Daisy Park

Green crane bauble, £10, Rockett St George

Vintage mercury glass bauble garlands, £45 for 2, Cox & Cox

Purple bauble with flowers, £9, Heavenly Homes & Gardens

Gisela Graham fairground sequin flying hummingbird, £27 for 3, Amara

Gemstone Forest frog prince bauble, £8, John Lewis & Partners

Handmade teal velvet peacock cushion, £45, Audenza

Glass tulip decoration, £24, Choosing Keeping

Tree glass tea light holder, £8, Sophie Allport

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop

Gold, ceramic and antique gold baubles, £19.99 for a set of 3; TruGlow LED Candles, from £19.99 for 4 votives; Townhouse advent calendar, £39.99; Osby large star window light, £19.99; Merry & Bright garland, £45.99; Paper fold-out star, £15.99, and gold leaf wreath, £24.99, all Lights4Fun

In the pink

Pair pale pastels with glitter and metallics for a pretty scheme with plenty of sparkle

Handmade stained glass guardian angel in pink, £19.99, Glass House Design

Bumble Beez Liberty fabric treat cone, £25, Not on the High Street

Etched stars mirror decoration, £7.50, Oliver Bonas

Egyptian glass candle holders in pink, £35 for 3, Raj Tent Club

Karala cut-glass champagne glass, £42.50 for set of 4, Rose & Grey

Stocking in Old Rose, £48, Tori Murphy

Christmas Tree crackers, £20 for a set of 6, Sophie Allport

Joanna Buchanan Sherbert mini bug clips, £78 for 5, Amara

Two small feathered hummingbirds, £8.50, Cox & Cox

Frosted Rose garland, £49.99, Very

The Calm One Christmas refillable candle, £29, Little Karma Co

Birdcage glitter-embellished glass decoration, £8, Selfridges

Eve bauble with real dried flowers and foliage, £12, Mary Elizabeth Flowers

Hanging flamingo decoration, £9.99, Walton & Co

Blue prancing reindeer decoration, £6, Dibor

Gold champagne bottle decoration, £4, Habitat

Beaded pink bow, £5, Next

Feature Holly Reaney

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Ring the changes

Give your home a festive flourish with a beautiful wreath, from fresh, fragrant florals to delightful dried designs made to last

Noëlle dried flower Christmas wreath, £65, Mary Elizabeth Flowers

Sparkle wreath, £40, The White Company

Pinecone wreath, £155, Marquis & Dawe

Vintage-style golden flowers wire wreath, £22, Cox & Cox

Frosted red berries wreath, £50, A by Amara

Copper, plum and gold fresh wreath, £120, The Real Flower Company

Blueberry Wreath, £55, Home Luxe Co

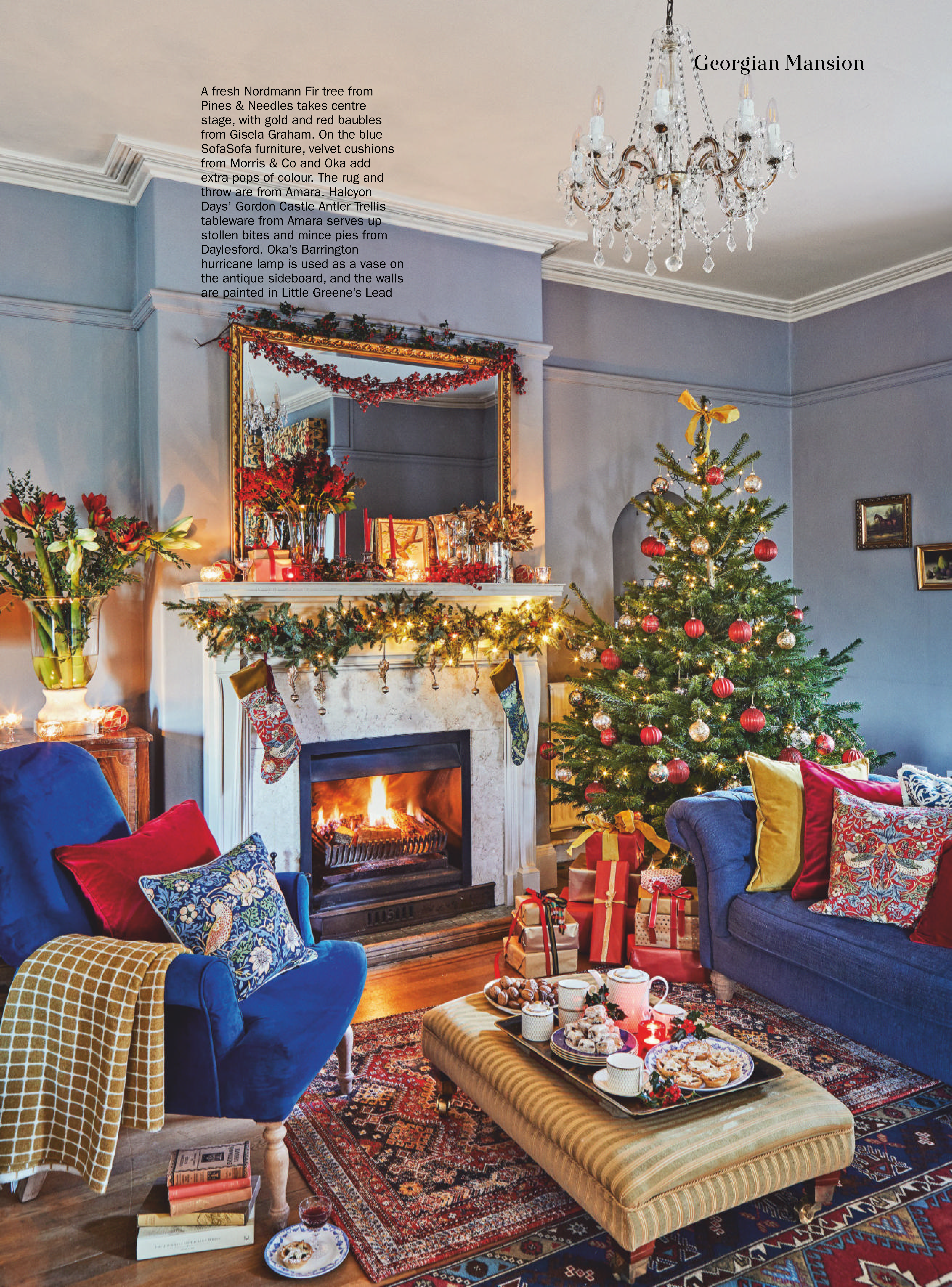
Bamboo shell wreath, £69.95, Sarah Raven

Feature Sophie Warren-Smith

TOGETHER FOR CHRISTMAS

When Caroline and Neil Baldwin bought a grand Georgian home, they not only renovated the building but also reunited it with the rest of its country estate

Words and assistant styling Karen Darlow | Styling Pippa Blenkinsop | Photographs Brent Darby



A fresh Nordmann Fir tree from Pines & Needles takes centre stage, with gold and red baubles from Gisela Graham. On the blue SofaSofa furniture, velvet cushions from Morris & Co and Oka add extra pops of colour. The rug and throw are from Amara. Halcyon Days' Gordon Castle Antler Trellis tableware from Amara serves up stollen bites and mince pies from Daylesford. Oka's Barrington hurricane lamp is used as a vase on the antique sideboard, and the walls are painted in Little Greene's Lead

Elegant and imposing, and with wide views across the Malvern Hills, this grand country house looks at one with its setting. However, until recently, the Georgian property was dated and damp. It had been cast adrift from its parkland and estate in 1913, and was in need of renovation. That was before Neil and Caroline Baldwin took it on.

When the house came up for sale, just minutes away from their family home and overlooking farmland that they already owned, it was an opportunity the Baldwins couldn't pass up. 'History and homes fascinate me,' says Neil, 'and the thought of restoring the house and reuniting it with the rest of the estate was very appealing.'

Their initial idea had been to split the property into flats, but long delays with planning permission led Caroline and Neil to look for another option. They decided to renovate and market the house for short lets. The discrepancy between the rather tired building in front of them, and the luxury holiday home they were aiming at was not lost on the pair. There were some pressing matters to attend to before the doors could be safely opened to guests. 'The parapet above the billiard room was sinking and coming away from the building, and inside everything needed to be updated or replaced,' says Caroline. 'We set ourselves a six-month turnaround because we needed an end date to keep things focused. The fact that we were going to be letting the house meant we could make decisions quickly as you remove yourself from it emotionally.'

Caroline and Neil's own family home is just a five-minute walk away so they were able to be very hands on with the renovations. They watched as the leaky façade and pebble-dash render were stripped back to bare brick. Then the decorative Georgian dentil mouldings – the 'teeth', Neil calls them – along the roofline and porch were reinstated, before the whole building was re-rendered with ivory coloured K-Rend to make it watertight once again and restore its classic country house elegance.

At some point in its history, the original sash windows had been stripped out. 'They had been replaced with single, plain panes of glass and looked sad and soulless,' says Neil. 'We were determined to give the house back its pretty Georgian eyes again.' A local carpenter, from Greenbuilding Company was charged with that task and fitted replacement wooden windows in keeping with the style and age of the property.

Inside the house, the electrics were made safe and a commercial-grade fire alarm installed. The kitchen and five bathrooms were refitted and updated. Although the Baldwins were determined to stick to their six-month schedule there was still time to consider the finished look. In the main bathroom, for instance, Caroline had fallen in love with the wall tiles, which date back to when the bathrooms were first added around the First World War. 'I loved the clean look of the narrow grouting and persuaded Neil, and the tiler, that we should keep the tiles as they were and replicate the look in the other bathrooms,' she says.

There were other period details that the couple were able to preserve. When they pulled up the musty drawing room carpet they were excited to find a parquet floor in good condition. They replaced the carpet with a rug so the special floor is no longer completely hidden. The chandeliers were another happy find that originally hung in the hallway. 'They were wasted there,' says Neil, 'and look much more at home in the drawing room.'

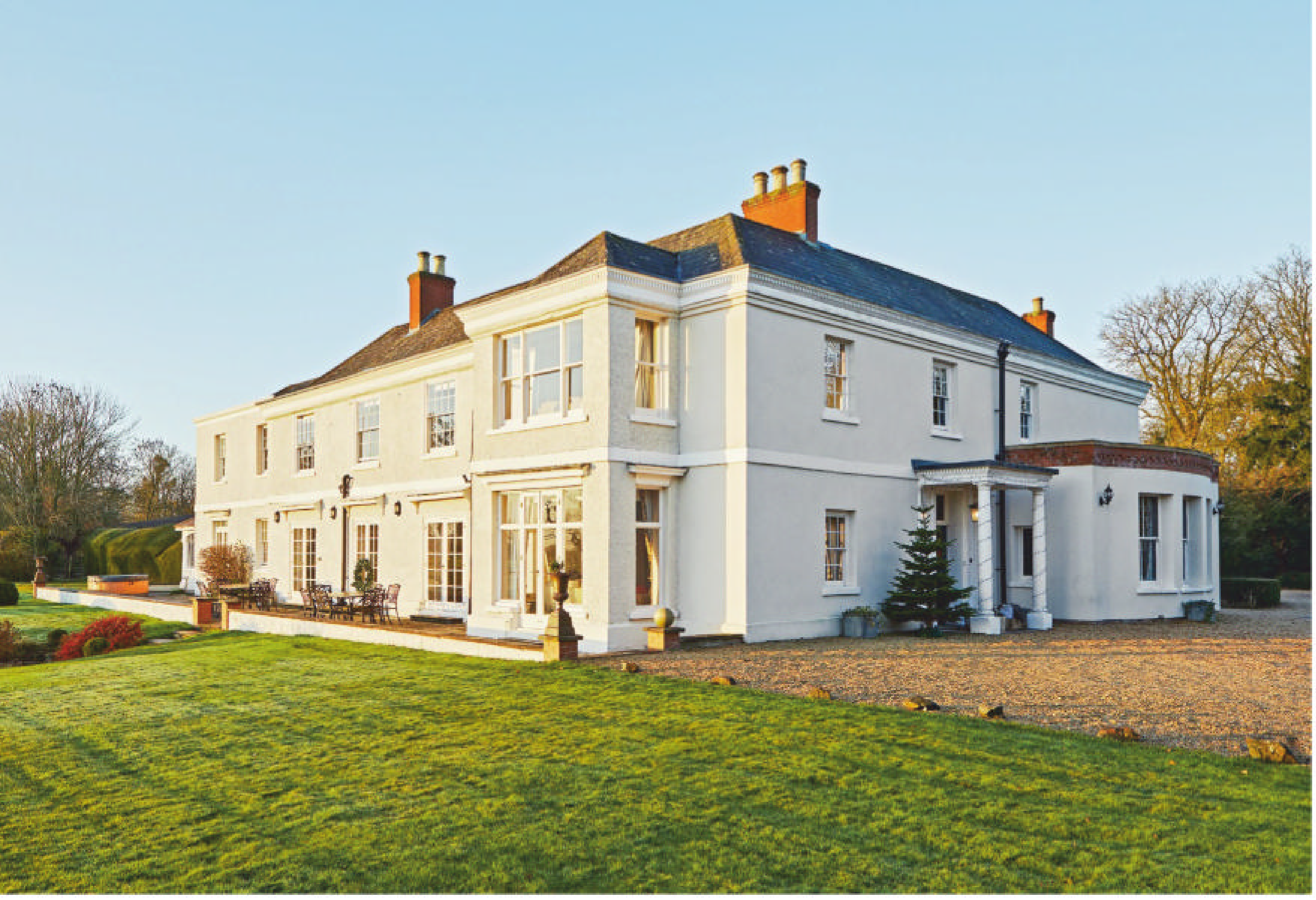
Of all the four reception rooms and eight bedrooms they updated, the kitchen is Caroline's favourite. 'I'd never have wallpaper in my own kitchen, but it's a different approach when it's a holiday let,' she says. 'I love the contrast between the traditional and modern elements in here: the original dresser, with contemporary chairs; the old table and the new light.' She's particularly pleased with one modern twist – a perspex splashback that protects the wallpaper around the sink and hob.

This comfortable union of old and new in the kitchen, sums up the vision for the rest of the house, too. 'It's our take on contemporary country house chic,' says Neil. 'Traditional interiors, but with a modern feel,' adds Caroline. 'So we have plenty of gilt-framed paintings, with a mix of antique and new furniture in a traditional style.'

The six-month renovation drew to a close. 'We had planned to spend the last two weeks dressing the house for our first guests,' says Caroline, 'but the decorators were still finishing off upstairs and the weather scuppered our plans.' The famous 2018 Beast from the East hit the area hard, and on the day their guests were arriving Neil and Caroline spent the morning carrying furniture and accessories across the snow-covered drive and putting the finishing touches in place. 'Thankfully the guests arrived safely and were delighted with the house and the snowy scene,' says Caroline.

When last year's bookings were cancelled in the pandemic, Neil, Caroline, and the children – Sophie, ten, George, nine, and Percy, seven, had Christmas here, taking advantage of the billiards room and the different view of the Severn valley. 'It gave us a few ideas for things to change when we refresh the décor, but it also made us appreciate just how much we've achieved here already,' says Caroline.

Read about the couple's renovation of their own home, in the January 2022 issue

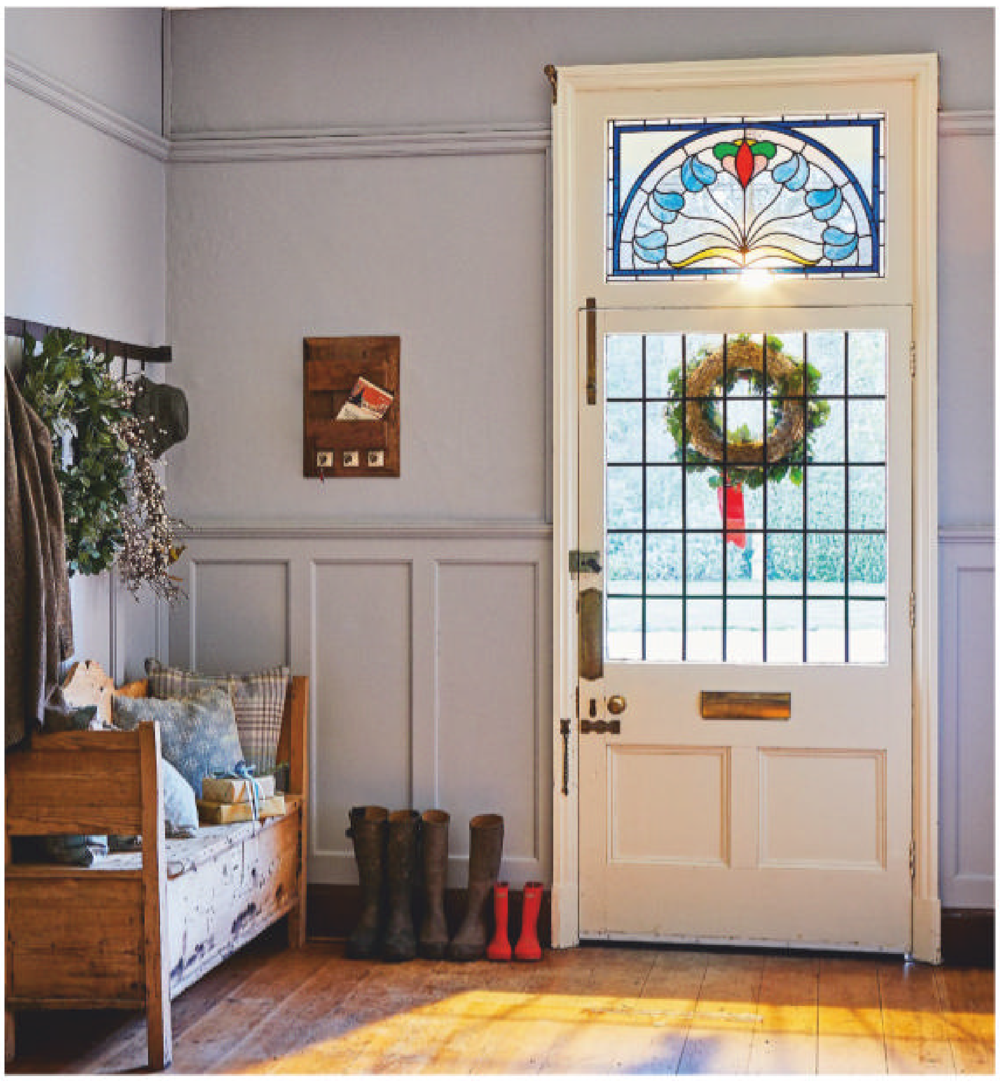


THE STORY

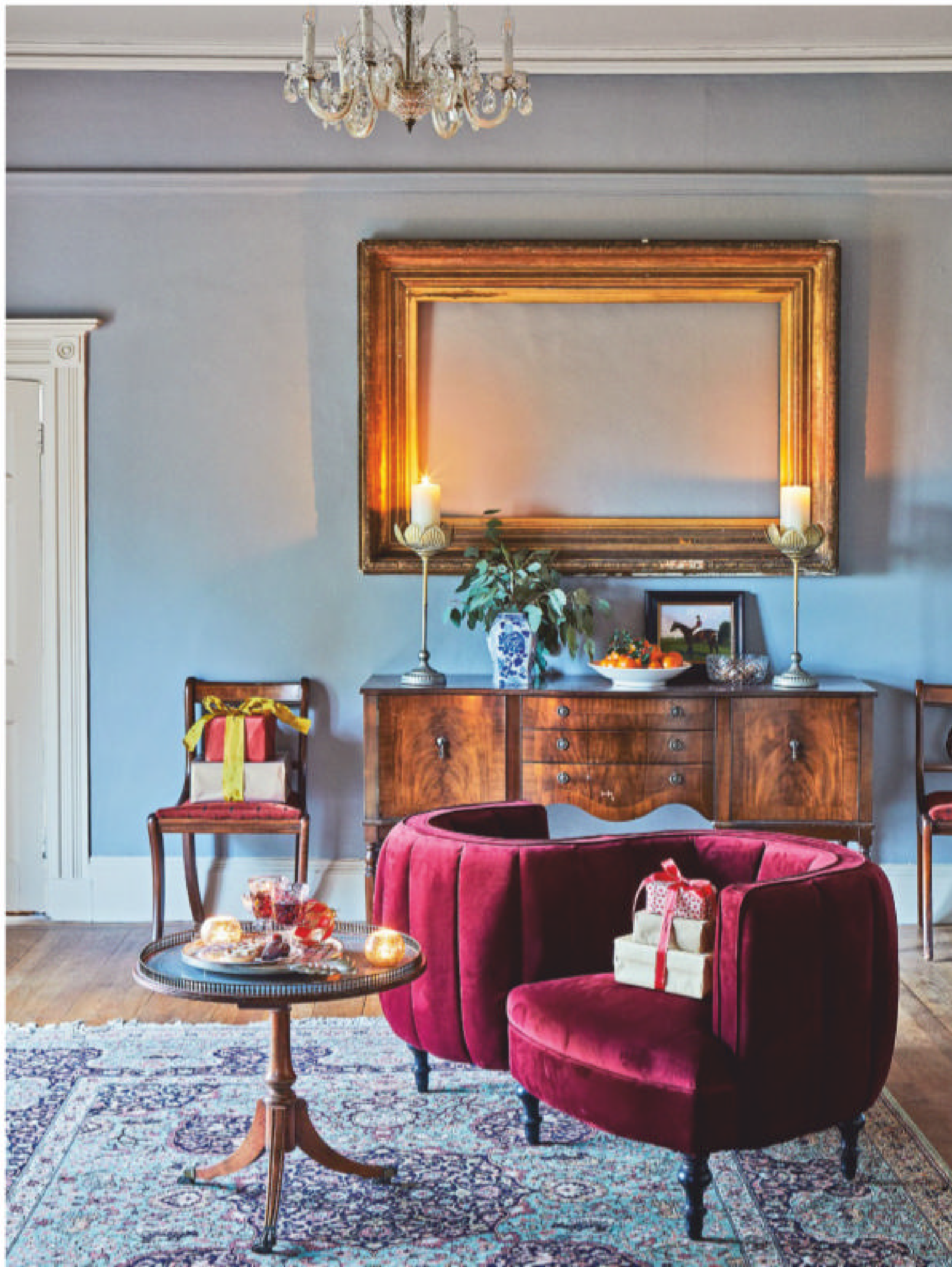
Owners Caroline and Neil Baldwin own the property. Neil is an insurance underwriter at Lloyd's of London, and he and Caroline jointly run Equestrian Manor as a luxury holiday let, visit luxurycottages.com to book

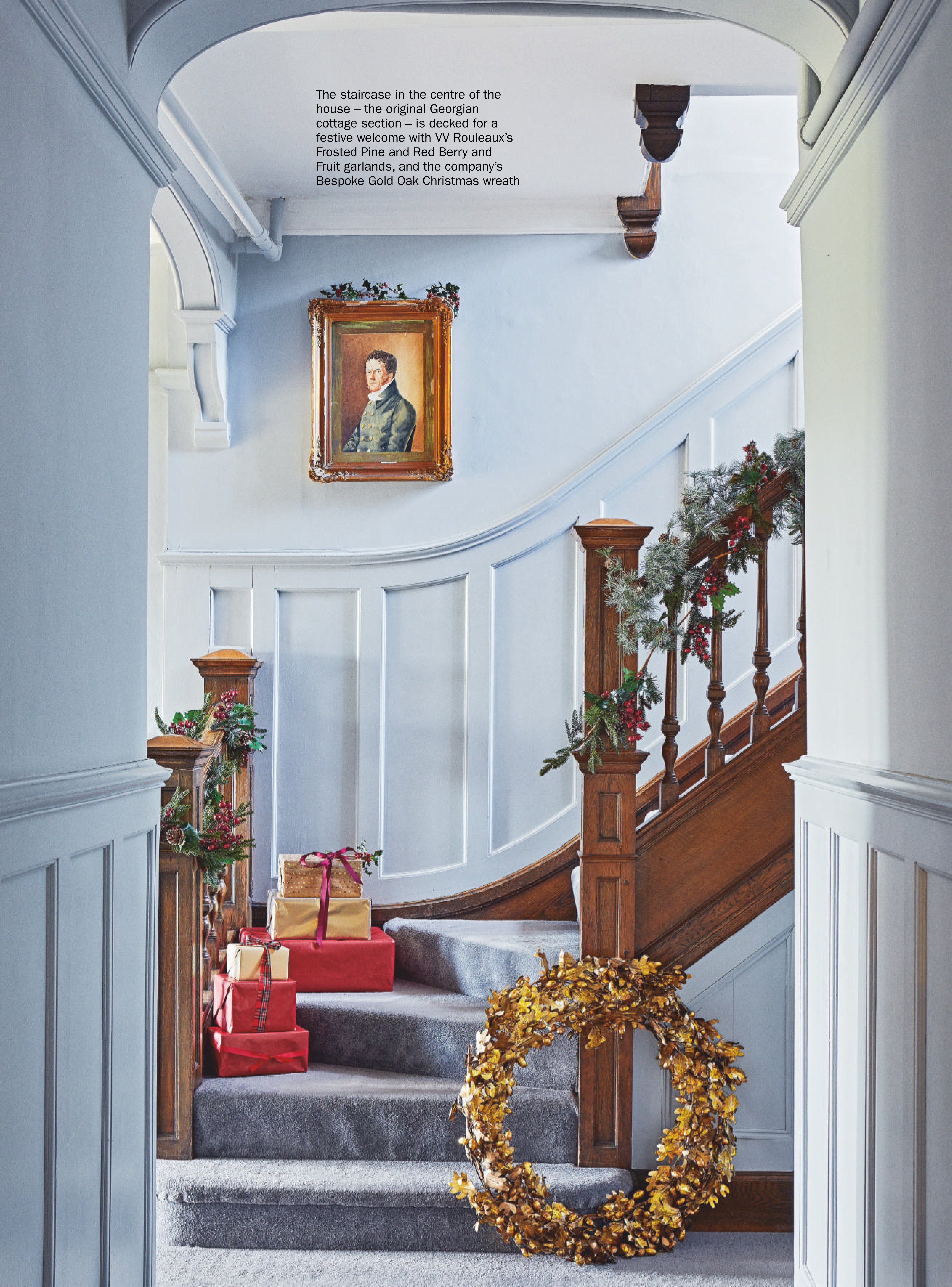
Property An eight-bedroom home in Worcestershire built in 1788 as a modest Georgian cottage, with later additions. The house is unlisted

What they did Neil and Caroline renovated the whole house. They stripped the façade and re-rendered it, and rebuilt the parapet that was coming away from the building. They refitted the kitchen and bathrooms

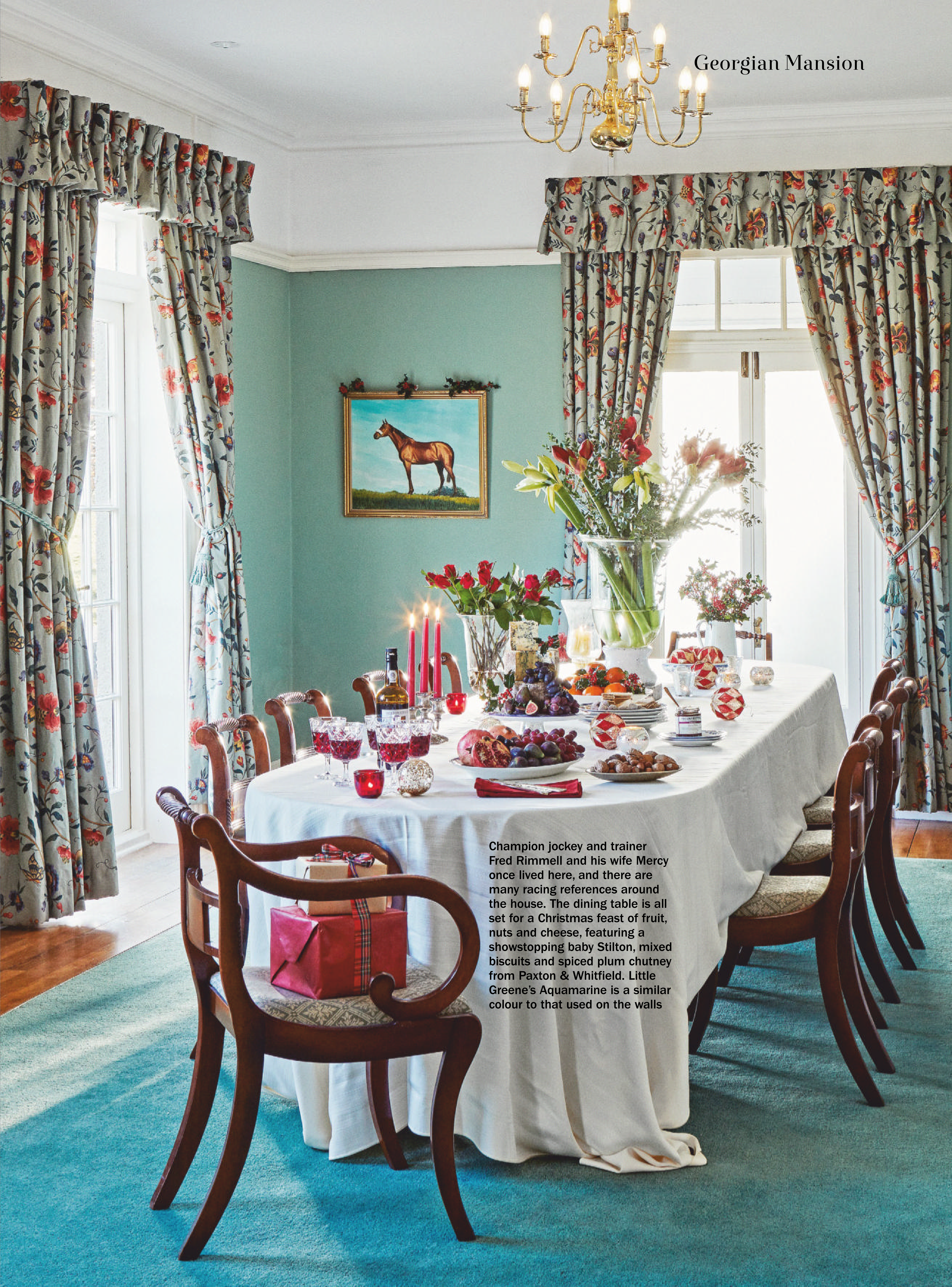


Top left: The elegant 18th-century home is available as a holiday let through Luxury Cottages
Above: The hall and panelling are painted in Mono, a soft neutral from Little Greene. The bench is antique, the blue cushions are by Susie Watson Designs, and the wreaths on pegs are from The White Company
Left: Phillips & Cheers' handmade stocking in Morris & Co's Strawberry Thief Crimson fabric. The hanging acorn decorations are from Oka
Right: Caroline spotted this unusual tête à tête sofa in a local furniture store. The rug, sideboard and wine table were bargain buys from an antiques dealer, and the tall Lotus candle holders are from Oka

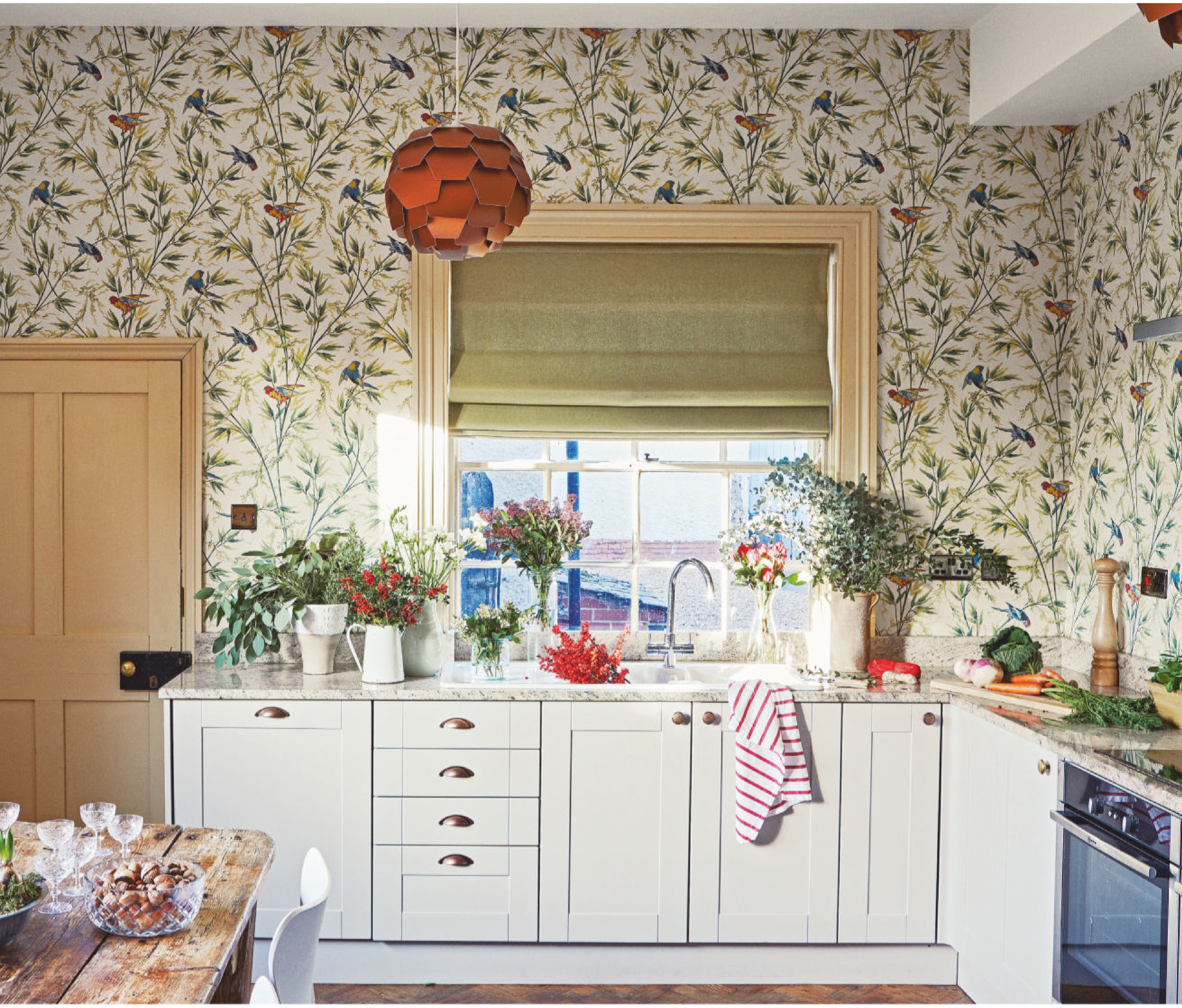




The staircase in the centre of the house – the original Georgian cottage section – is decked for a festive welcome with VV Rouleaux's Frosted Pine and Red Berry and Fruit garlands, and the company's Bespoke Gold Oak Christmas wreath



Champion jockey and trainer Fred Rimmell and his wife Mercy once lived here, and there are many racing references around the house. The dining table is all set for a Christmas feast of fruit, nuts and cheese, featuring a showstopping baby Stilton, mixed biscuits and spiced plum chutney from Paxton & Whitfield. Little Greene's Aquamarine is a similar colour to that used on the walls



Above: The kitchen encapsulates Caroline's approach to the interiors for the house – country house style with a contemporary twist. Simple cabinets from Benchmarx and Little Greene's Great Ormond St Tropical wallpaper are the perfect counterpoints to the elegant sash window, timeworn antique table, and original panelled door

Left: The original scullery cupboards and dresser have been painted in Little Greene's Aged Ivory. On the table is a hazelnut and chocolate panettone from Daylesford

Above: The wall tiles date back to around 1913, when all the bathrooms were first added. The flooring is Camaro vinyl from Polyflor. For a similar bath, try Burlington. The cushion on the antique chair is from Susie Watson Designs
Right: Like the bathroom, the pink bedroom overlooks the estate's farmland. The assorted linen cushions, large jug and blue throw are all from Susie Watson Designs. The walls are painted in Little Greene's Dorchester Pink
Above right: The tiles in the bedroom fireplace also date from about 1913
Opposite: Views all round from the stunning bay window. The walls are painted in Little Greene's Celestial Blue. The smaller cushions are from Susie Watson Designs and the wreath is from The White Company

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A WINTER'S TALE

Sam MacLean has created a cosy interior in her idyllic weatherboarded farmhouse, and it's the perfect setting for a family Christmas

Words Vivienne Ayers | Photographs Polly Eltes

COUNTRY GARDEN

Sam outside her 15th-century Essex farmhouse. She says it's a great home for all seasons. 'It's cool in summer and really cosy in winter – and it's set in a beautiful rural location so we can see the seasons happening around us'

THE STORY

Owners Sam and Rob MacLean, founders of High House Weddings (highhouseweddings.com), live here with their twin sons William and Albert, and two cats, Tiger and Lily
Property The Grade II-listed weatherboarded farmhouse is set in an Essex village and dates from the 15th century with Georgian additions. The family moved here in 2015
What they did Sam and Rob fully renovated the house. They sandblasted the timber beams, replaced and renewed the floors, updated the kitchen, creating a more open-plan kitchen-diner, changed the bathroom and redecorated throughout

Christmas Day is Sam MacLean's birthday so, not surprisingly, for her it's the biggest day of the year. And the quaint weatherboarded farmhouse that she lives in with husband Rob and their twins William and Albert, is the perfect location for festive celebrations. Their home's beautiful surroundings – six acres of landscaped gardens and rolling meadows – were also the catalyst for the family's wedding venue business.

Sam's parents bought the characterful property, along with a dilapidated barn and grounds, in 2004. When Sam and Rob were married in 2010, they had their reception in a marquee in the garden, and it sparked the idea for using the barn and grounds as a wedding venue. However, it took another five years for the plans to come to fruition as they had to obtain planning permission to renovate the barn and get permission to have a marquee on site.

Sam and Rob decided to move and live in the farmhouse in 2015 when the weddings began. 'We were going to be leaving our London jobs and be involved in running the business, so it made sense to move here,' says Sam.

The house hadn't been touched since the 1970s. 'The décor didn't suit the house,' says Sam, so she and Rob decided to renovate it and decorate it in a style that was more in keeping with the age of the house. 'We took everything back to basics,' says Sam. The beams throughout the house were sandblasted to restore them to their original warm honey colour. The kitchen was then ripped out and, to create a more open-plan kitchen-diner feel, the wall was knocked through and the beams in it were exposed to make a feature of them. 'The Aga was already in place in the kitchen, so we built grey country-style cabinets with wooden worktops around it.'

The couple discovered that the house was literally built on mud, so new flooring had to be put down in some of the rooms. The floorboards in the living room, for instance, were rotten and couldn't be saved, but upstairs, when the carpets were pulled up, ancient wide wooden floorboards were revealed. 'The floorboards in the guest room are part of the original 1450s house. They were black when we uncovered them so we had them restored and taken back to the original wood.'

The family bathroom was another major project as Sam and Rob wanted to make the room more spacious. Originally it was the main bedroom's en suite with a separate toilet next door, so the wall in between was removed to create one large space, and tongue-and-groove panelling and a roll-top bath were added to give it a classic period feel.

When deciding how the interior should look, Sam was keen to respect the age of the house and so opted for calming colours. 'The living room and hall are Georgian, so I used pale blue and grey paints that were appropriate to that era. For the rest of the house, I chose shades that wouldn't detract from the period features, such as the roof beams and fireplaces. The colour choice was vitally important as it helps make it feel calm and relaxed.'

Sam has incorporated many treasured finds into the scheme. 'Your home is made up of the things you love, pieces that you've inherited so you have a family memory, items you have been given as gifts so they remind you of a person, or that you found on a weekend away or holiday and that bring back memories of that trip. It's all part of what makes your house your home,' she says.

The work on the house was completed just before Christmas 2015 so this time of year is full of happy associations. 'I love the house in December. It's so cosy in the winter – the open fire and Aga make it feel Christmassy. I enjoy putting up decorations and it's an excuse to go to town with the house. I like to add in pops of red and the neutral backdrop works well with this. We really enjoy the festive season as it's a quieter time of year for the business and a period when we get to be at home and enjoy it,' says Sam.

'I'm really looking forward to bringing the boys up here as we have so much land and amazing wildlife,' she adds 'We hope it will be a wonderful place for them to grow up.'

Top: The original farmhouse has rooms that date back to 1450; its weatherboarded exterior is typical of homes in the area

Above: The six acres of grounds and gardens include a heart-shaped lake, a real draw for local wildlife and for the wedding business that Sam and her family run here

Right: Sam foraging in the garden for berries and greenery to decorate the house. The old barn behind her was renovated in 2015

Left: The dining table and chairs are from Angela Reed, and the pendant lights are from Jim Lawrence
Above: Soft grey cabinets and a shallow butler sink set the scene for a classic country kitchen. For a similar sink, try Neptune
Below left: A red dresser adds a punch of festive colour; for similar, try Ikea
Below: Sam and Rob removed a wall, exposing the beams to make a feature of them
Right: The Aga is the focal point of this space, where mellow wooden beams enhance the cosy feel. The kitchen cabinets, rug, clock and red lantern are all from Ikea; blinds in Little Orchard Evergreen fabric, from Blinds2Go

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Above left: A traditional-style open wood-burner from Regency is set into the imposing inglenook in the snug. Tiger the cat waits patiently for someone to light the fire
Above: Sam prefers simple, warm white fairylights for the house; try Garden Trading for similar
Right: Festive cushions and a Christmas tree enhance the Yuletide feel in the living room. The armchair is from Next, and the walls are painted in Dulux's Polished Pebble
Left: For a similar chair, try The French Bedroom Company. Nordic Nest sells various festive cushions

merry

Floral bedlinen from John Lewis & Partners creates a pretty country scheme; for a similar bed, try Julian Bowen. The bedside lamps and stacked suitcases are from Oliver Bonas. Cox & Cox sells similar pendant lights

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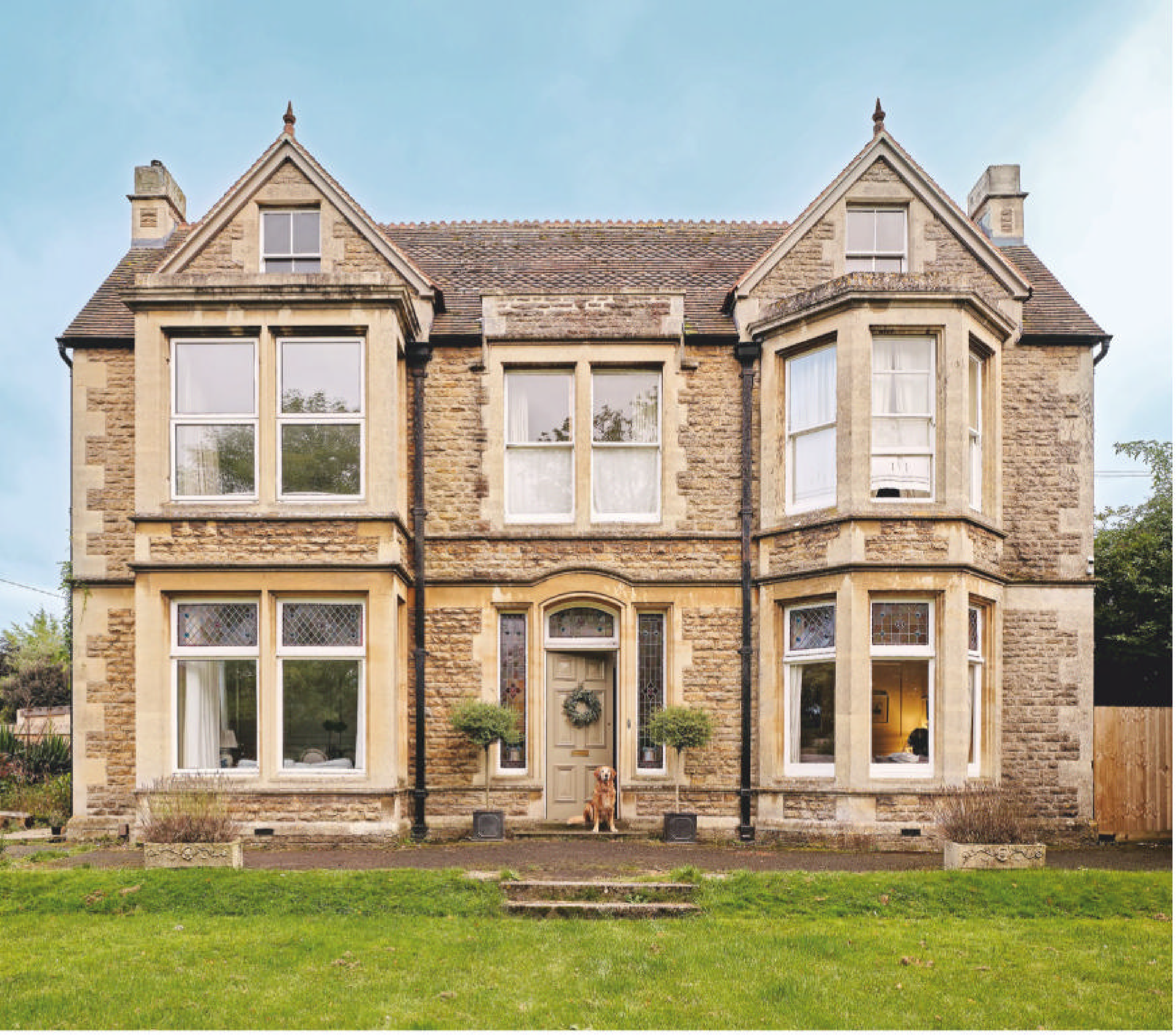
ALL IS CALM

Taking time to get to know their family home as they renovated each room, Victoria and Mark Henderson have created elegant interiors that really shine at Christmas

Words Ife Adedeji | Styling Pippa Blenkinsop | Photographs Adam Carter

Victoria favours natural Christmas decorations and made her own garland with foraged finds. The real Nordmann fir Christmas tree was supplied by Croft & Cole (croftandcole.com), with baubles from Gisela Graham, Sarah Raven and Amara. Amara's glitter bird clips perch atop the tree and on Victoria's garland, with handmade heirloom stockings by Velvet Linen. The mirror is from Hand Crafted Mirrors; the sofas and ottoman are from Sofa.com; Sage velvet cushions from Nordic House; Oli ruffle cushion from Also Home; and 'Joy' cushion by Jan Constantine at Amara

London

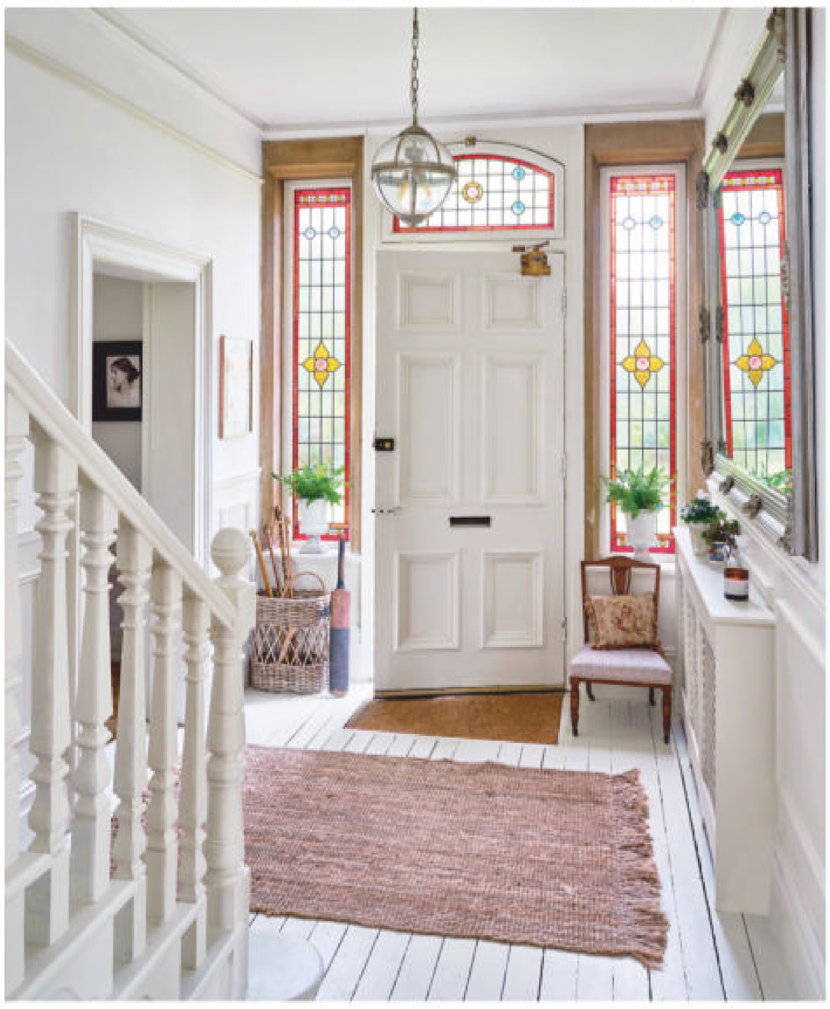


THE STORY

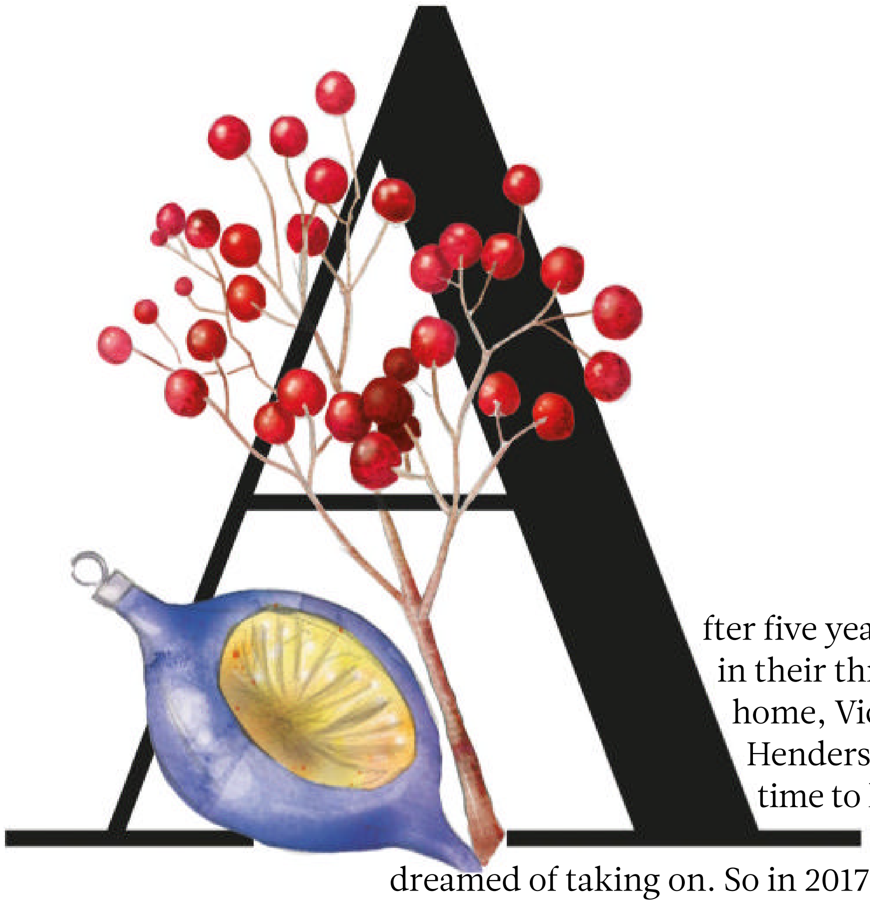
Owners Victoria Henderson works in finance and lives here with husband Mark, who works in business strategy, and their eight-month-old son Frederick, plus golden retriever Bear

Property A detached Victorian home built in 1880 and located in Wiltshire. There are four bedrooms and two bathrooms, a boot room, dining room and drawing room

What they did Taking one room at a time, Victoria and Mark called in the professionals to replaster and rewire. They repainted all of the rooms in the house themselves and are slowly reinstating original features and adding antique and upcycled furniture as they go along



Top: The double-fronted house was built in 1880, with a large garden *Above*: The hall and its stained-glass panels made a big impression on the Hendersons when they viewed the house. Victoria reupholstered a handcarved, antique chair with fabric by Susie Watson Designs – the seat was practically non-existent, she says *Right*: Victoria with golden retriever Bear. The Everlasting Eucalyptus door wreath is from Sarah Raven



After five years of living in their three-bedroom home, Victoria and Mark Henderson knew it was time to look for the project they'd always dreamed of taking on. So in 2017 their search began in earnest. 'For two out of the five years we were living in that house, I was looking for something else,' says Victoria. 'This house came up after another one fell through, but in hindsight it's much better than the one I'd initially set my heart on.'

The detached Victorian property has a sizable garden to the front and side, and is a short walk from open fields. It's also perfectly situated for Victoria to forage leaves and berries to make her own natural decorations, such as wreaths and garlands, for Christmas. 'Usually we go to my parents for Christmas, but we'd love to start having it here,' says Victoria.

The couple got into a bit of a bidding war, before securing ownership of the property. 'One of the people we were bidding against was going to turn the house into flats,' explains Victoria. 'They would have ripped out the 150-year-old stained-glass windows and fireplaces. Fortunately we won.'

The stained glass is in the hallway, drawing room and dining room, and is stunning, especially in the south-facing dining room, which gets a lot of light, especially in the summer. 'Although the house is beautiful in the summer, I actually prefer it in the autumn and winter,' says Victoria. 'We have a big open fire in the drawing room and you can come in and put the fire on and light candles. It's especially lovely at this time of year, when it feels really homely. I always get excited about Christmas and now we have Frederick it's nice having the idea that Father Christmas can come down the chimney – it makes the house feel even more special.'

When the couple first moved in everything was overgrown, but despite this the house was still very striking. 'Walking into the large hallway with the detail and glass, we could see it was a beautiful property,' recalls Victoria. 'But you had to look past a lot of mess and dust, where the previous owners had started jobs and left them unfinished.'

Some of the wallpaper had been stripped from the stairway, for instance, and only half of the banisters were painted. Fortunately there was no structural work to be done, but replastering the entire property still took a long time as the house has such generous proportions. Decorating had its challenges, too. 'The ceilings are three metres high so painting the ceiling and walls wasn't easy and we did it all ourselves,' says Victoria. She and Mark decided early on to focus on renovating one room at a time, starting with the drawing room so they could have somewhere to escape to.

'Everywhere else was a mess,' says Victoria. 'We had lots of people coming in and out of the house to do the electrics, fit a new boiler and do the plastering. The couple moved in and for months they got by sleeping on a mattress in their bedroom with no curtains. 'Our room looked like someone had started off with the roller and then got bored. It had the original fireplace and a worn carpet, but other than that it was empty – a blank canvas,' adds Victoria. 'After we'd been here for six months my parents bought me a sewing machine and I made the curtains and the canopy over the bed.'

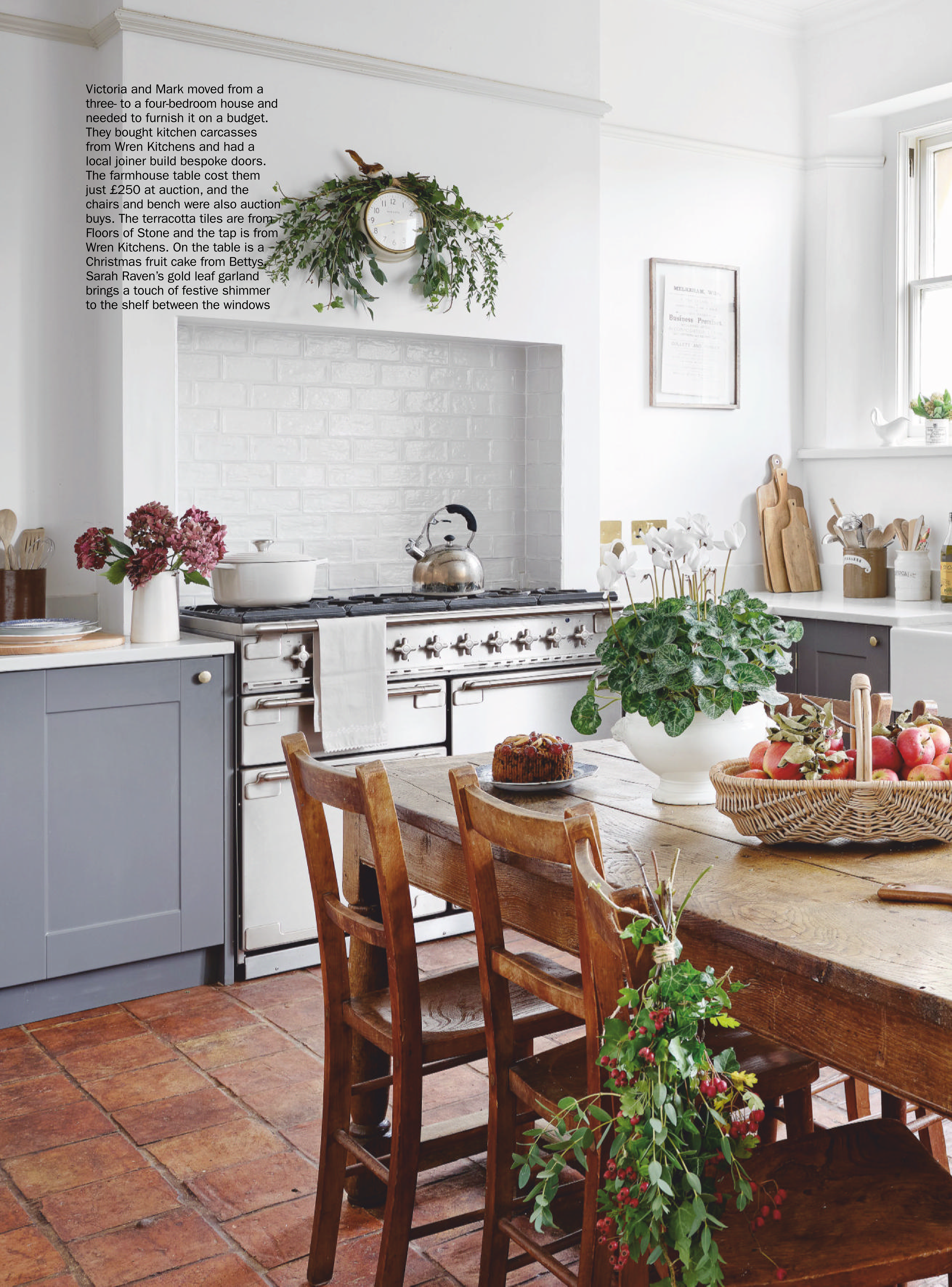
One space that needed quite a bit of work was the now stunning boot room. It had pine panelled walls and doubled up as a utility space with a sink and washing machine. The original terracotta tiles were beautiful, but were very damaged and couldn't be repaired. 'We decided to replace the floor, remove the pine, and had a carpenter build the cupboards and a window seat that provides storage for our DIY tools.'

The generous kitchen appears even grander thanks to three large sash windows that bring in lots of natural light. 'Although the kitchen was fine and we could live with it, it didn't make the best use of the space,' says Victoria. 'We boarded up a door that led to the back and created a U-shape layout using Wren kitchen carcasses and bespoke doors made by the carpenter.'

Victoria and Mark decided against wall units, wanting a light and airy look to provide a contrast against the blue base units. They also laid terracotta tiles, which look like they've always been there, on top of underfloor heating.

Surprisingly, the house isn't listed, which made life easier for the couple when they were making changes. Victoria says that they would consider asking for listed status if they ever decided to sell the house. That scenario is quite unlikely, however, since during the course of their hands-on renovation the couple have grown ever more attached to the house. 'This is our forever home. There's so much space and it's a great location,' says Victoria. She and Mark are looking forward to celebrating Frederick's first Christmas here, and to many more family celebrations here in years to come.

Assistant styling Holly Reaney and Karen Darlow



Victoria and Mark moved from a three- to a four-bedroom house and needed to furnish it on a budget. They bought kitchen carcasses from Wren Kitchens and had a local joiner build bespoke doors. The farmhouse table cost them just £250 at auction, and the chairs and bench were also auction buys. The terracotta tiles are from Floors of Stone and the tap is from Wren Kitchens. On the table is a Christmas fruit cake from Bettys. Sarah Raven's gold leaf garland brings a touch of festive shimmer to the shelf between the windows

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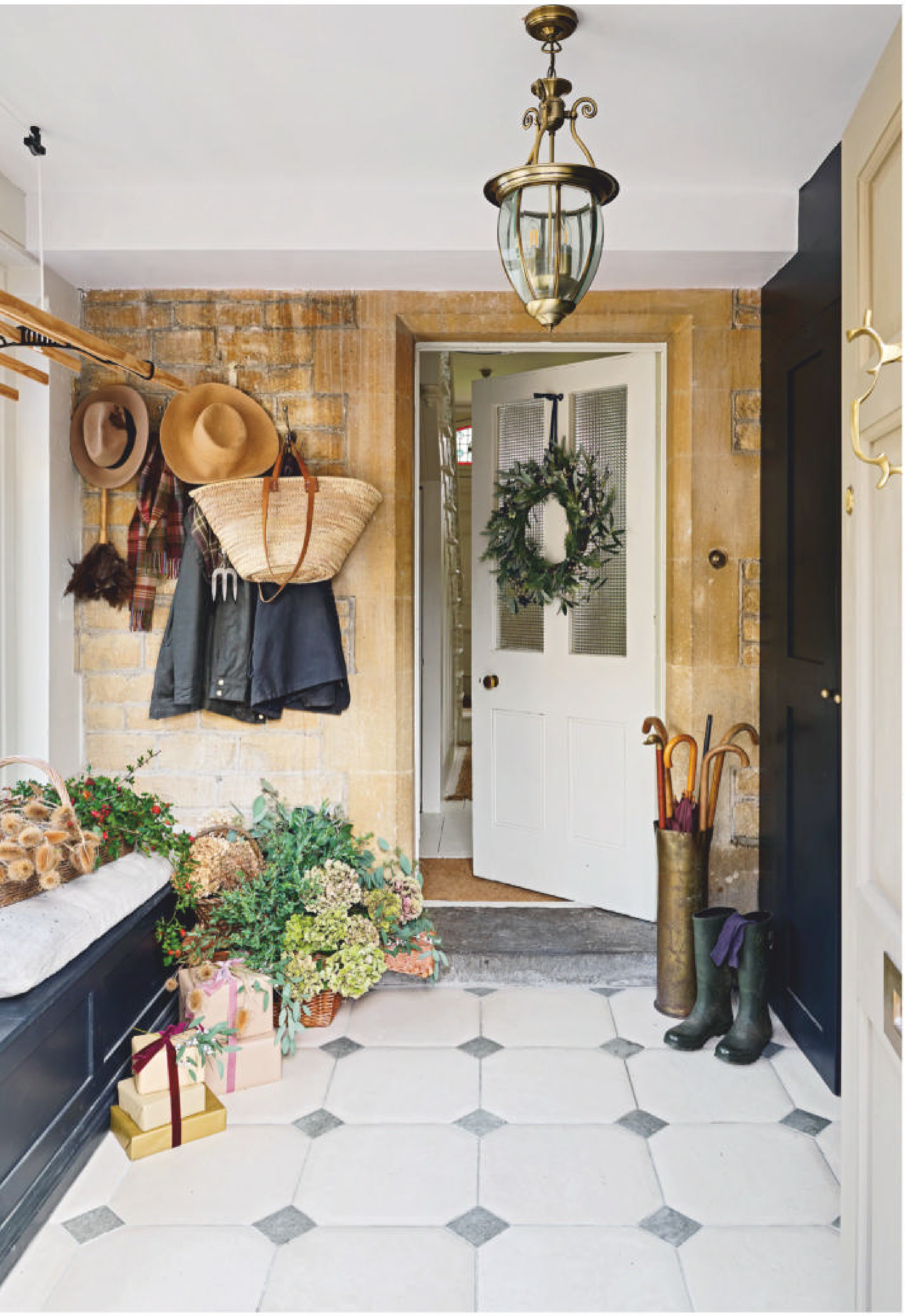
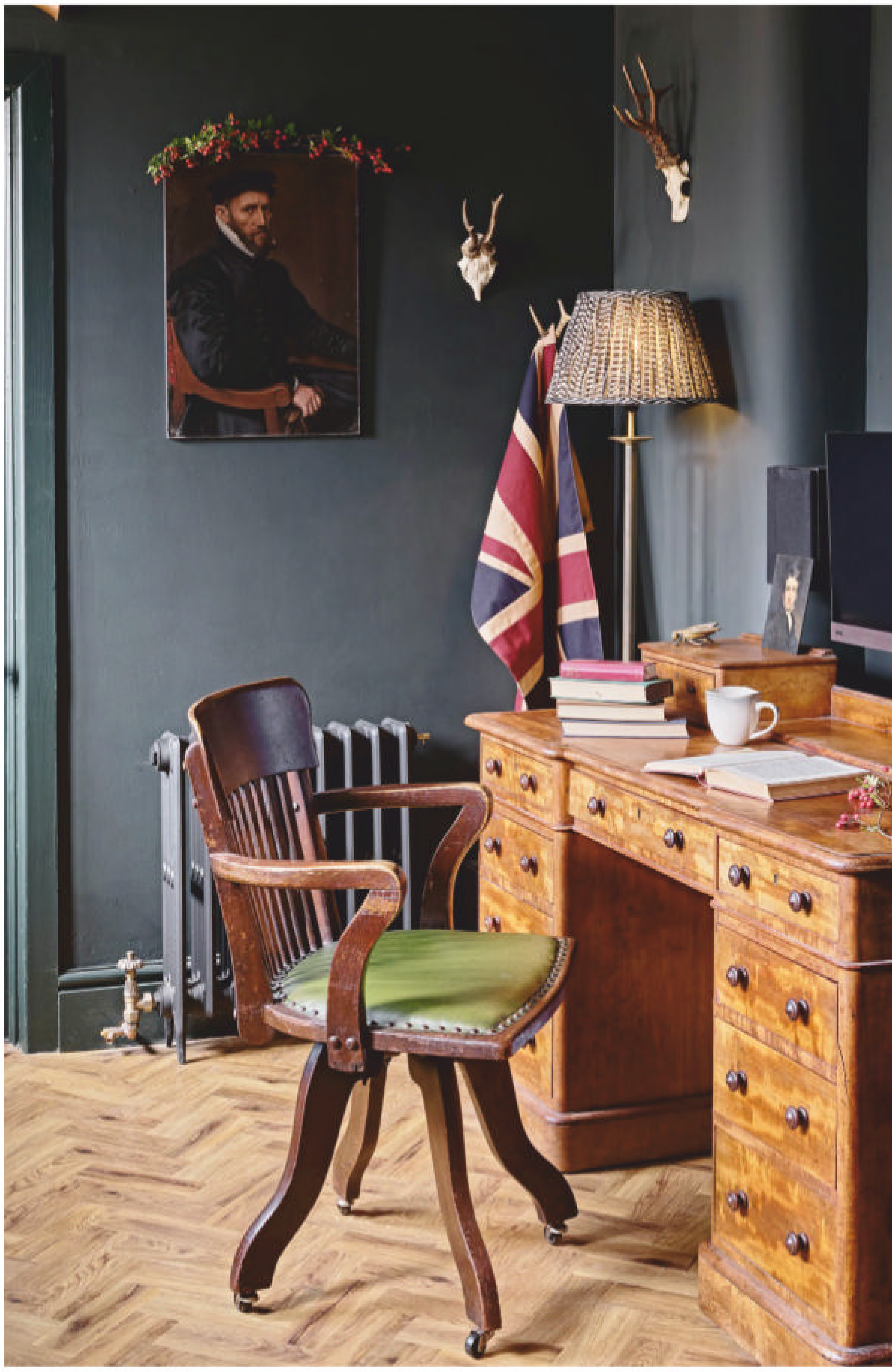
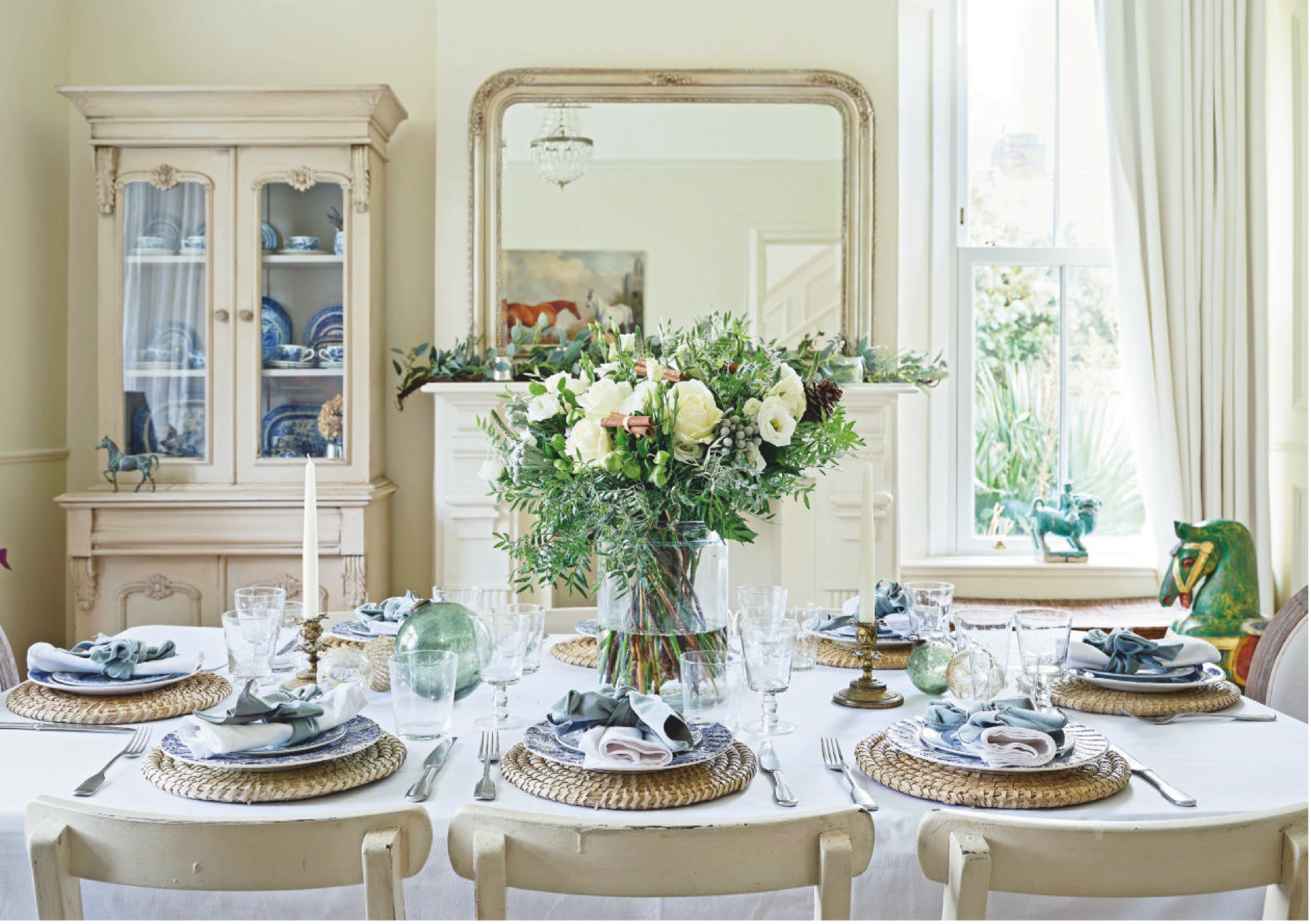
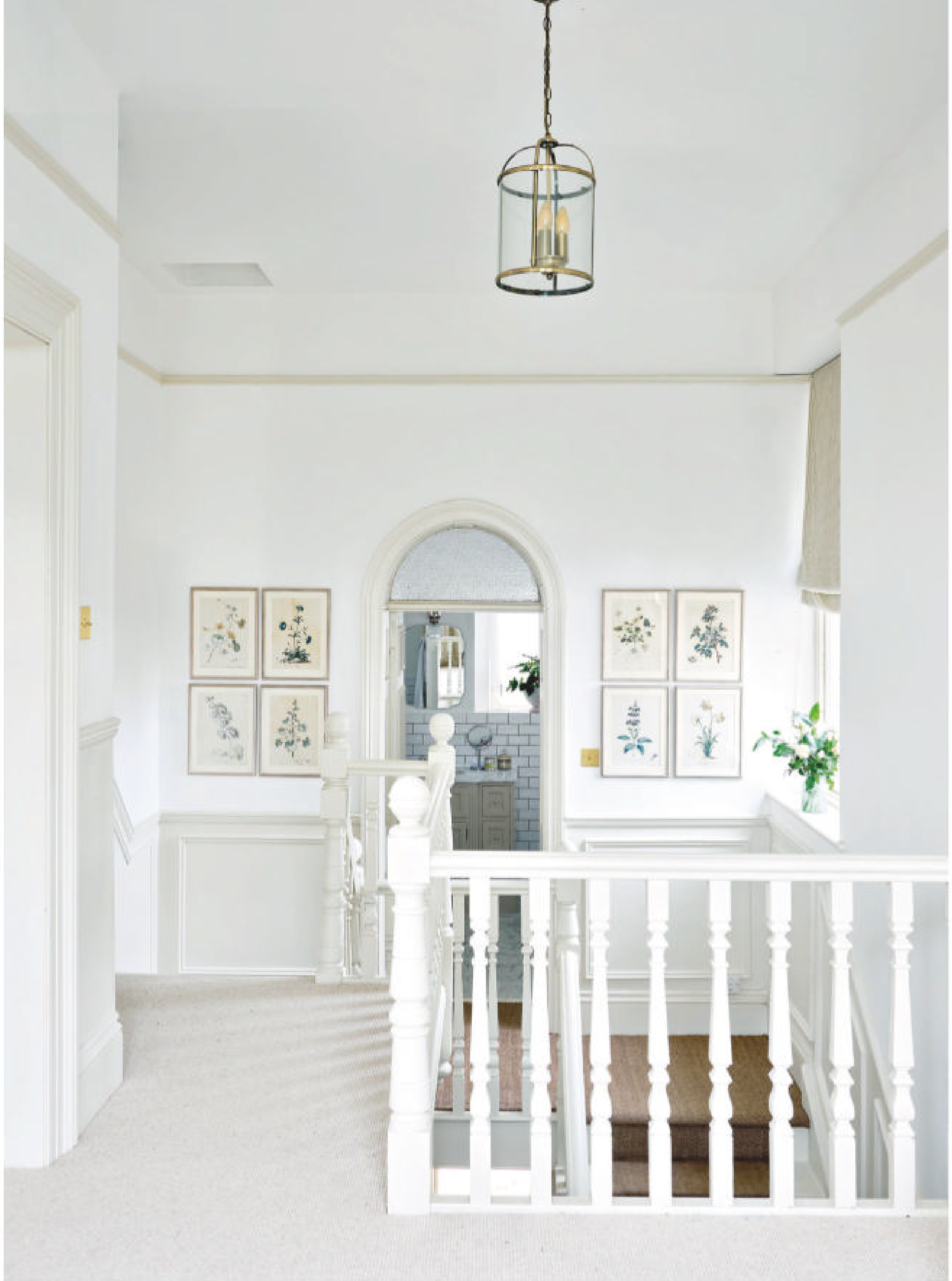




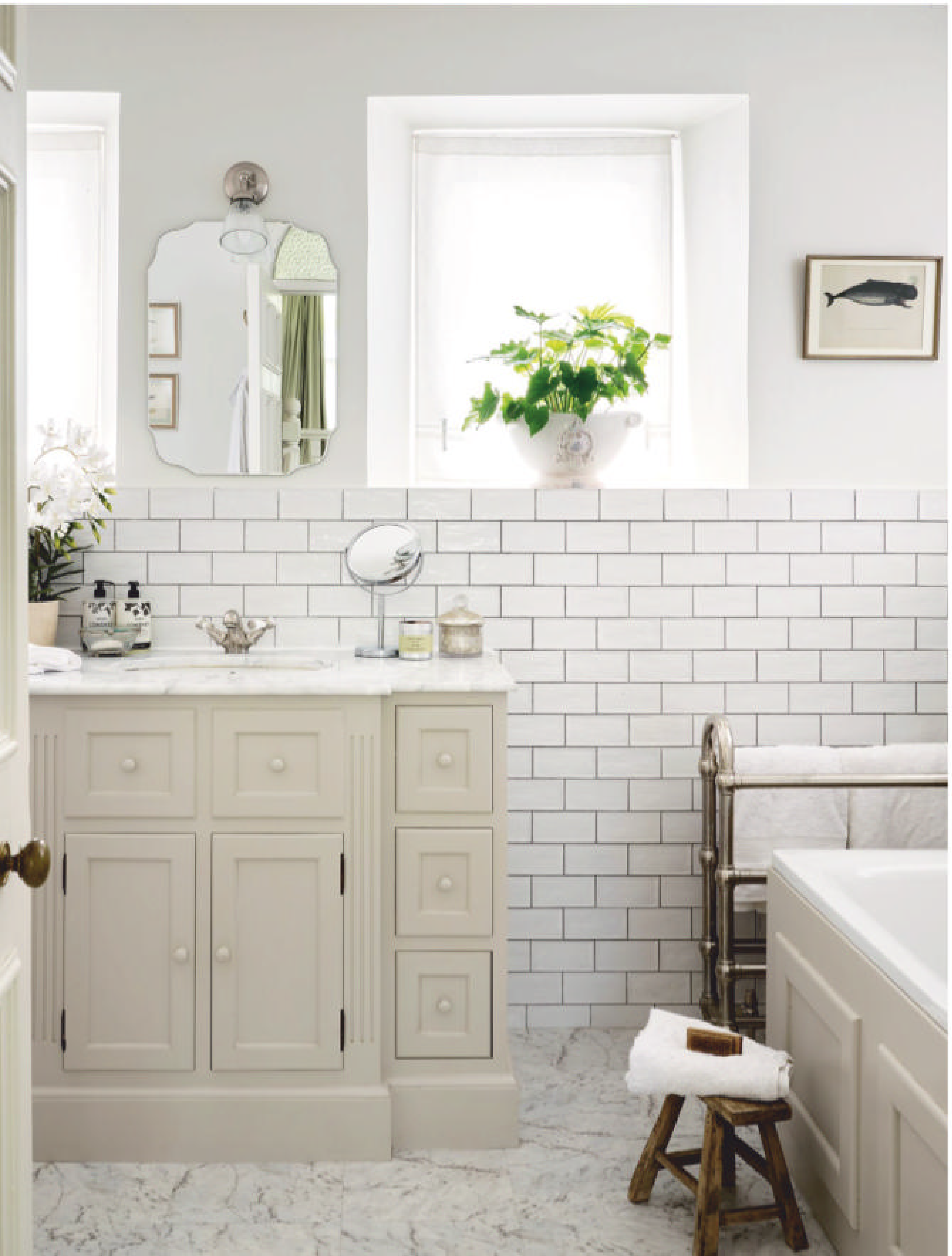
Above: The light in the bootroom came from Victoria's grandmother's house. When she decided to replace it, Victoria was happy to snap it up. The flooring is from Mandarin Stone, and the couple plan to run it through the hallway, too. The wreath on the door is from Nordic House
Above right: The glass bird bauble is from a set of three at Sarah Raven
Right: As the office ceiling is lower than the rest of the house, the couple opted for a more dramatic shade, Farrow & Ball's Studio Green, to make the space feel cosier. The desk was an Ebay find, and the chair is from Facebook Marketplace. The lampshade is from Pooky, the picture is from House of Bizarium, and the flooring is from Karndean
Left: Bear keeps himself cosy next to the Rangemaster Elise dual-fuel range cooker

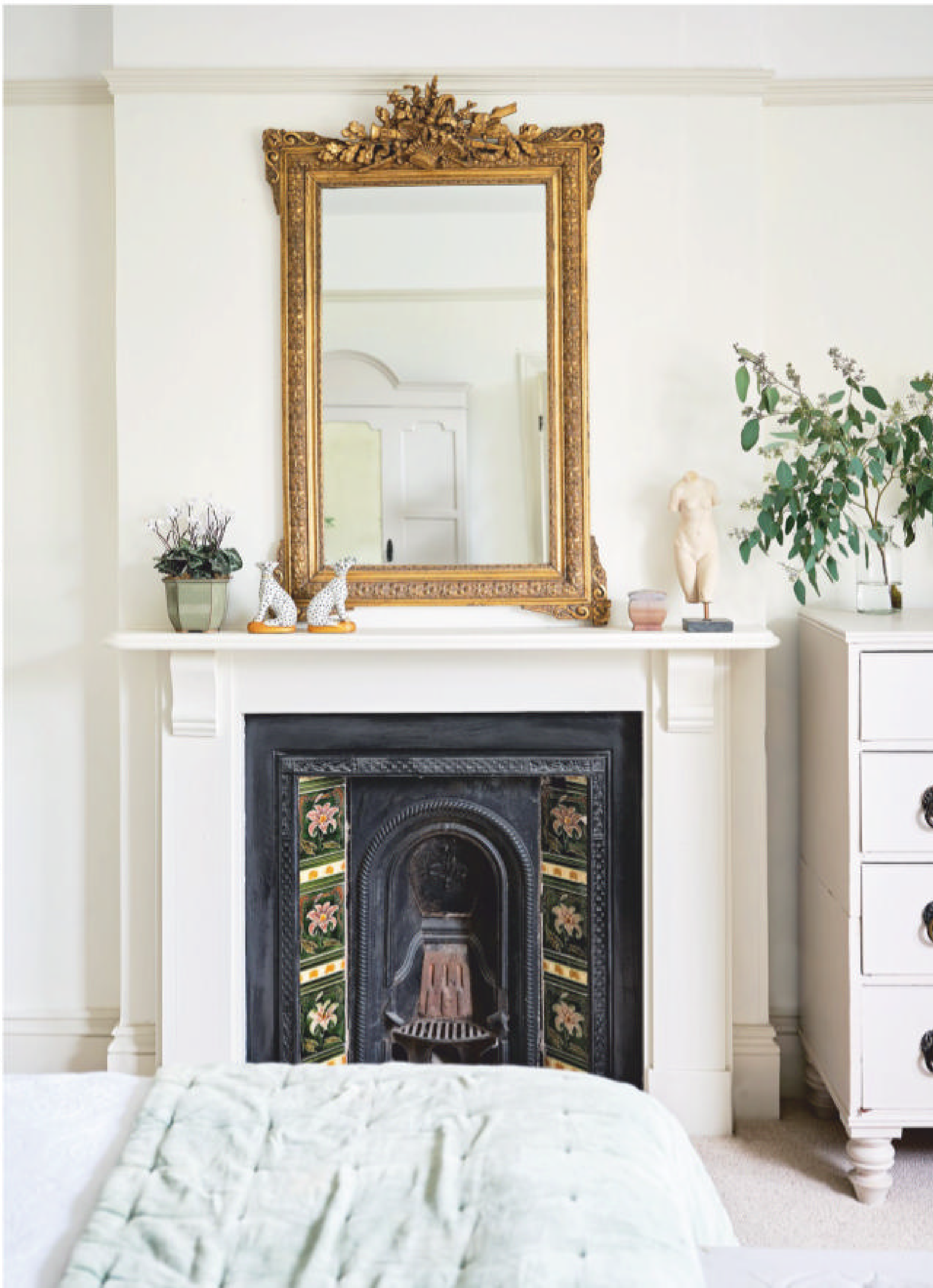


Above and right: Victoria created this elegant Christmas table setting using her favourite mismatched vintage blue and white china. The wooden chapel chairs were Ebay buys, now painted, and the table was Victoria's parents' old dining table, which she sanded and repainted. The dresser is from Belle Biche Interiors. A stunning winter bouquet from Arena Flowers makes a beautiful seasonal centrepiece and features white roses, frosted foliage, pine cones and cinnamon bundles. The large glass baubles on the table are from Nordic House and the garland and tealight holders are from The White Company *Opposite*: 'The dining room is the warmest room all year round as it's double glazed,' says Victoria. 'We have 32 windows in the house and there are a few that need some TLC – they're on our to-do list.' Victoria bought the rocking horse locally for just £35, as it was badly damaged. Mark's brother made new ears for it and reattached the tail and it now looks as good as new. Behind it is an old laundry hamper



Left: The couple decided to reinstate the panelling on the stairs and landing to give the high walls more detail. Victoria bought the antique botanical prints as a set. The pendant light is from Dunelm
Below left: Victoria said the bathroom used to be the worst room in the whole house. She bought a cheap cast-iron bath and had it re-enamelled, then found an old cabinet on Ebay, and got a local stonemason to make the plinth and cut out a hole for the sink. Taps from the Cast Iron Bath Company and a coat of Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath paint are the finishing touches. The bevelled mirror is from Dunelm
Below: The mirror above the fireplace in the main bedroom is from French Farmhouse Furniture
Right: Victoria made the bed canopy herself, along with most of the curtains in the house. She says furnishing a period property can work out cheaper than buying for a new home, particularly if you buy secondhand or from auctions. She found the bedside drawers in a junk shop and painted them in Pigeon by Farrow & Ball. The lamps and shades are from Oka, and the bedding is from Dusk, topped with a pale green throw from Christy. The carpet is from Tapi





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CELEBRATING THE PAST

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, Lara and Frans van den Berg's atmospheric home and shop are magical spaces, filled with vintage decorations for the festive season

Words Wilma Tjalsma-Smits | Photographs Joyce Vloet/CocoFeatures

Above: Antique decorations and natural greenery bring the house to life at Christmas
Right: When Lara's interiors shop is closed, the back room becomes the family's dining room. The panelled wall was the home's only original feature, but Lara and Frans used salvaged materials to add period details. The chairs, lights and accessories are from the shop; pottery is from Douwe Egberts

PRIVE

Unusually for Frans and Lara, they didn't say a word to each other in the car on the way back from viewing the house for the first time. Each of them was afraid the other didn't like it, but in reality, the property had made a big impression on them both.

It was only once they were back home that they dared to admit that this was their dream house and that, if they bought it, it would need a lot of work. 'That same evening we drew up dozens of plans and sketches of how we thought it should be and made up our minds to put in an offer,' says Lara. The property had been on the market for eight years and there was a lot of overdue maintenance. The garden was full of overgrown trees, shrubs and weeds. Inside, every original period feature had been removed. 'Despite all this, it was still love at first sight for us,' says Lara.

Lara and Frans picked up the front door keys on 22 December 2014, and just three days later they had removed all the upstairs walls. By New Year's Eve, the first floor was completely redesigned. 'We always see possibilities in every building, but the layout of this house had to be totally reworked,' says Lara. 'For example, the living room was originally a bathroom with a toilet. Even on that first viewing we could see it would be the best place for the living room, as we had different plans in mind for the front part of the house.'

The house was built in 1910, in the centre of Horst in Limburg province in The Netherlands. The front section of the property had been lived in for many years and the back part was originally a barn. At some point in the 1930s, the front and back sections were connected with a simple corridor link in the middle. One of the first things Lara and Frans did to the downstairs space was to turn the corridor into a cosy kitchen, before transforming the former barn into a welcoming living room full of beautiful period details.

They had to work hard to get it looking like this, however. 'Everything that looks authentic has actually been added by us,' says Lara. 'There were no original features in the living room at all. But we could see it had so much potential.'

As well as repurposing materials from elsewhere in the house, the couple drove around the country trawling salvage yards for suitable pieces they could incorporate in the reconfigured living spaces. Lara and Frans are both very creative, and working together on this project has revealed just how well they complement each other's skills. 'I have a strong visual sense and I know instinctively how a room should be redesigned or decorated to make the best of the space,' says Lara. And Frans? 'He is very handy and can make everything I want!

'Things do still evolve, but everything has turned out exactly as we imagined it after our first viewing.' That includes Lara's vision to run a brocante and interiors shop from the rooms at the front of the house. When she shuts the shop in the evening, this space with its long farmhouse table becomes the family's dining room. 'It is so attractive,' says Lara. 'There's an old panelled wall in here – the home's only truly authentic feature – and because of the wall, the high ceiling and the vintage items from the shop, I don't have to add much to it to make it cosy.'

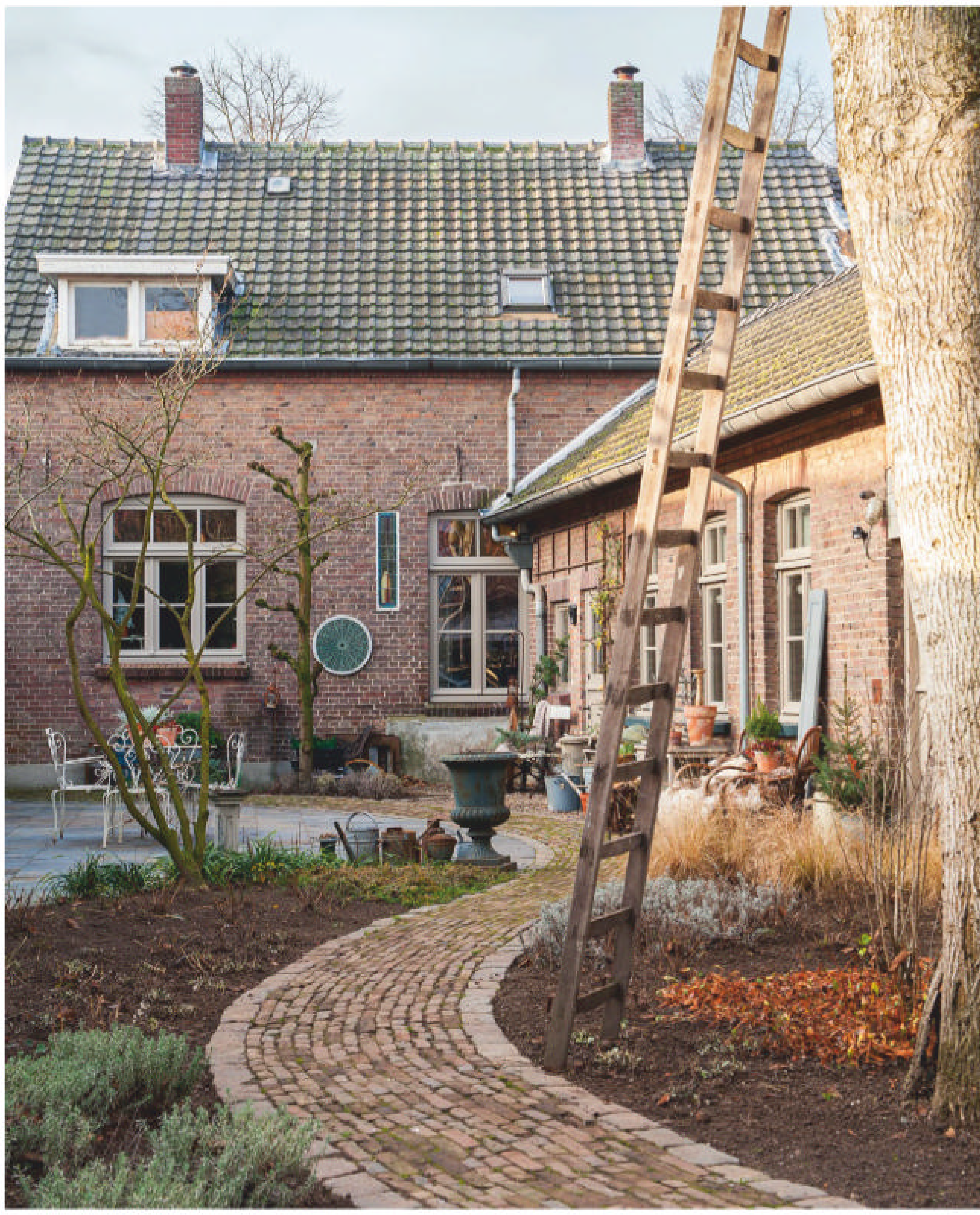
'I love antique and vintage items. Frans and I have visited numerous markets in France and Belgium, bringing the most beautiful things back here to Horst for my shop, where I sell everything that makes me happy.' It seems the things Lara chooses for her shop make other people happy, too. From November onwards, her store and her home are completely immersed in Christmas.

'I love Christmas. I used to help my mother to decorate the tree and house. I was always very careful with the antique baubles, because I thought they were so beautiful,' says Lara. 'Since then I have developed my own style, but my passion for vintage and antique Christmas accessories is just as strong as it ever was.' She still uses decorations that once belonged to her grandmother and mother. 'I also buy something new every year. For me, Christmas is not about following trends,' she adds.

Christmas trees, Lara confesses, are a bit of a weakness. She buys quite a few from the local Christmas tree seller. 'I'm always drawn to the slightly straggly, almost misshapen ones. I feel quite sorry for them. When I see one I think: "come on over to our house" – only to find out how ugly the tree is once I get it home!' she laughs. The tree she bought for her living room this year had quite a few bare branches. 'I filled it with eucalyptus and it looks, if I may say so, very nice and it smells fantastic, too,' she adds.

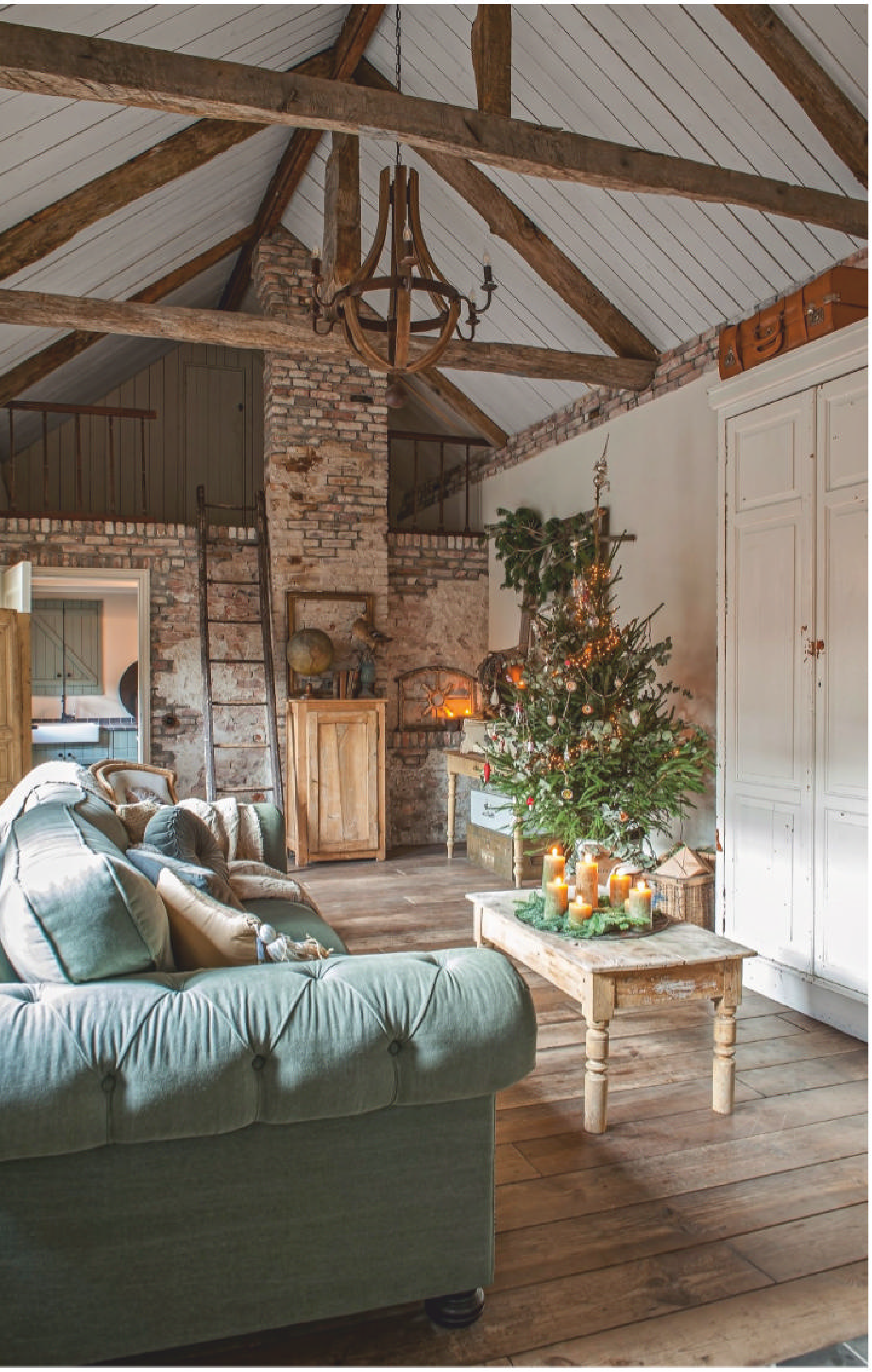
The shop, kitchen and the garden are already full of Christmas spirit. 'I start planning for Christmas in the shop very early in the year, and I buy decorations for it all year round. By mid-December I am exhausted,' she says. 'But somehow I still manage to find the energy to decorate our house and make it look extra special. It's not so full on as the shop, but I always find space to set out the precious family decorations that we keep upstairs in boxes in the attic.'

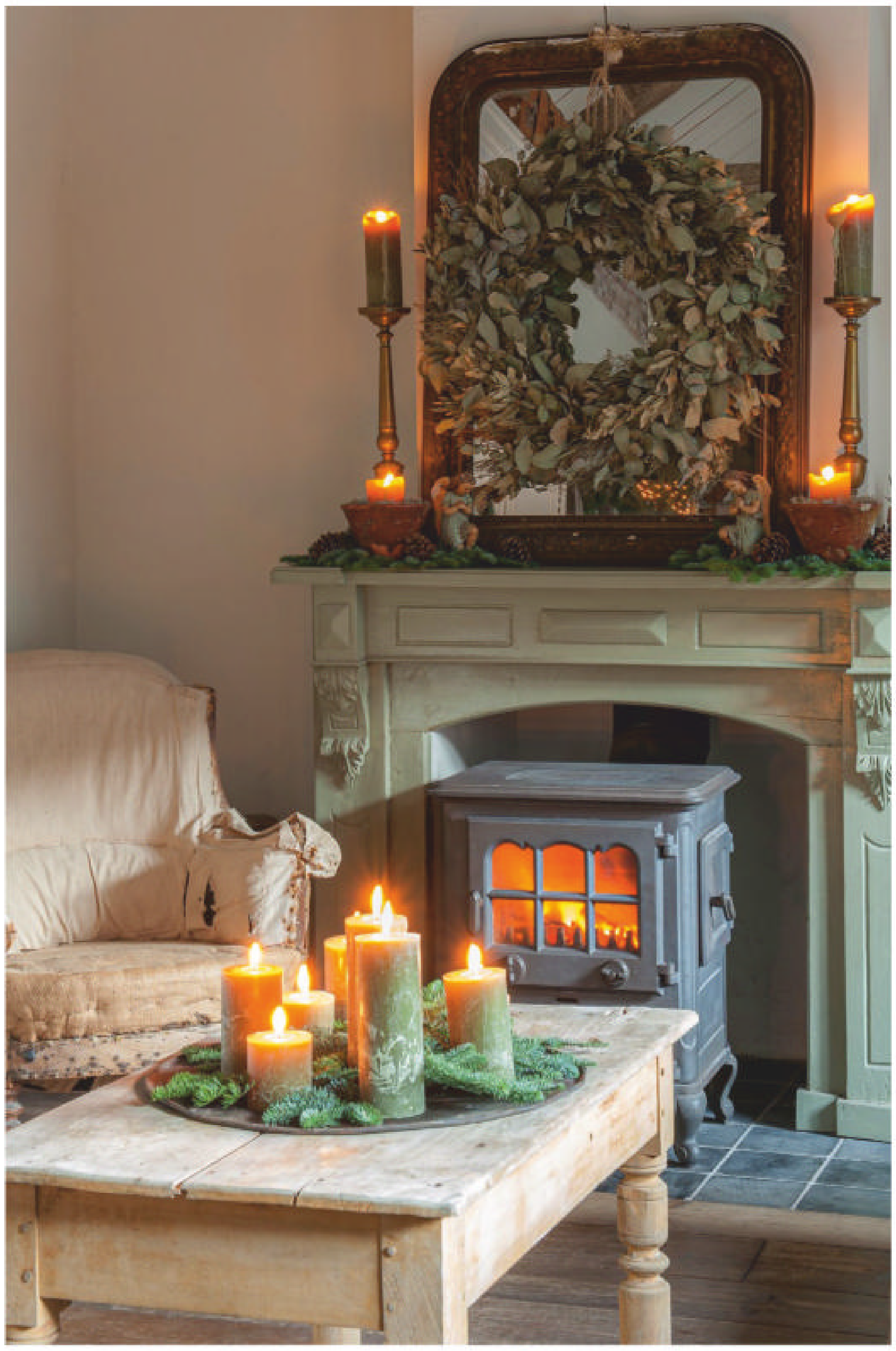
Left: Lara in the living room, surrounded by some of her favourite vintage finds. She stripped back the armchair to reveal the rustic hessian and linen underneath. Behind her, an old ladder leads to the mezzanine
Below: The outdoor space at the back of the house is compact, but Frans and Lara have created a secret garden with country-style plantings and a vegetable patch
Bottom: Furniture and accessories provide festive flavour, including an old garden bench, metal baskets, cosy sheepskins, and groupings of mini pine trees, berries and wreaths

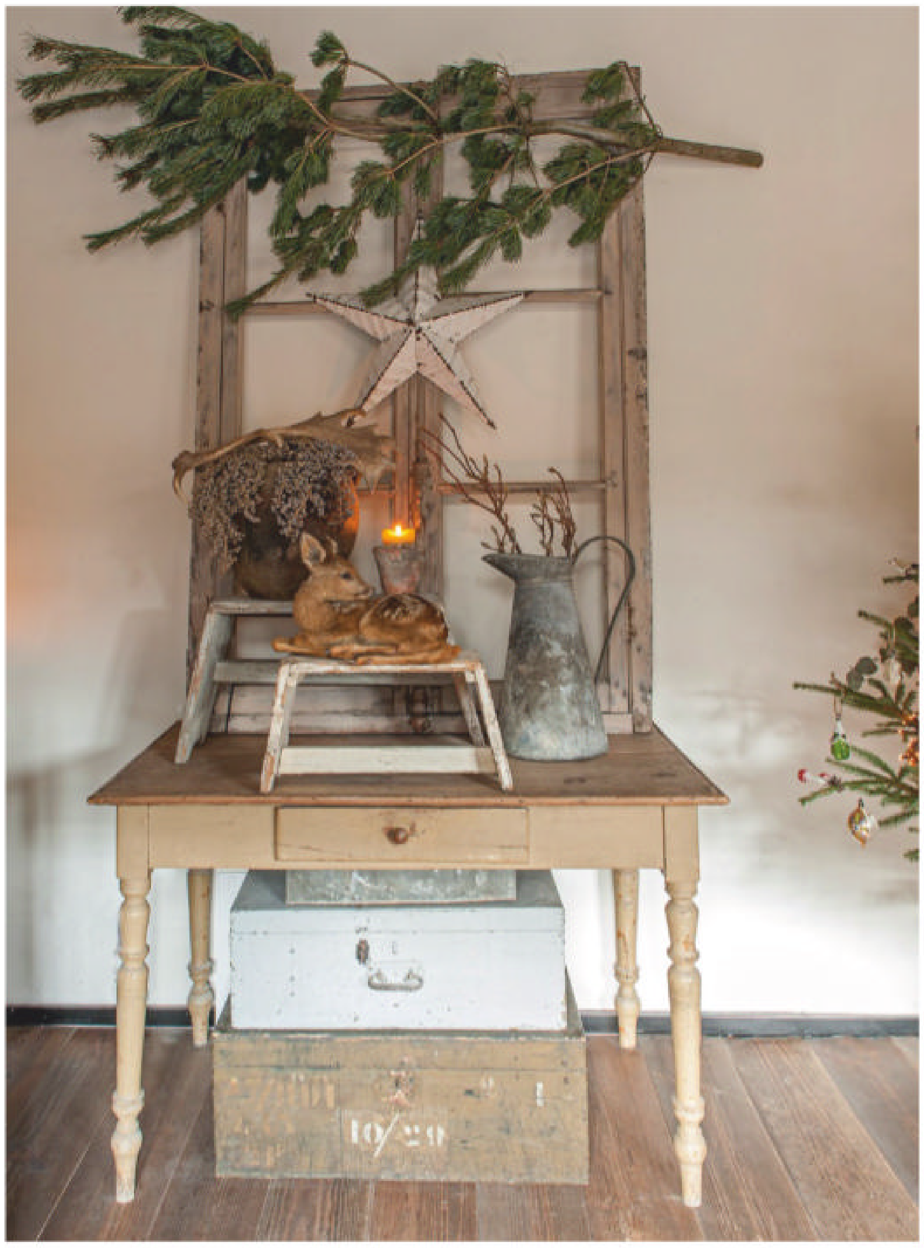


THE STORY

Owners Lara and Frans live here with their baby daughter Fiene and French bulldog Izzy. Lara runs a brocante shop in the front section of the property, and Frans is a landscape and garden architect
Property The house is in the village of Horst, in Limburg province in the Netherlands. It was built in 1910 and renovated by Lara and Frans in 2014. The family live in the back part of the building, where there are three bedrooms and one bathroom
What they did Lara and Frans reconfigured and renovated the whole house. What was once a bathroom was turned into a living room, a former corridor is now the kitchen, and the barn became an extra living space. The couple added authentic period details, by repurposing materials from salvage yards and from elsewhere in the house

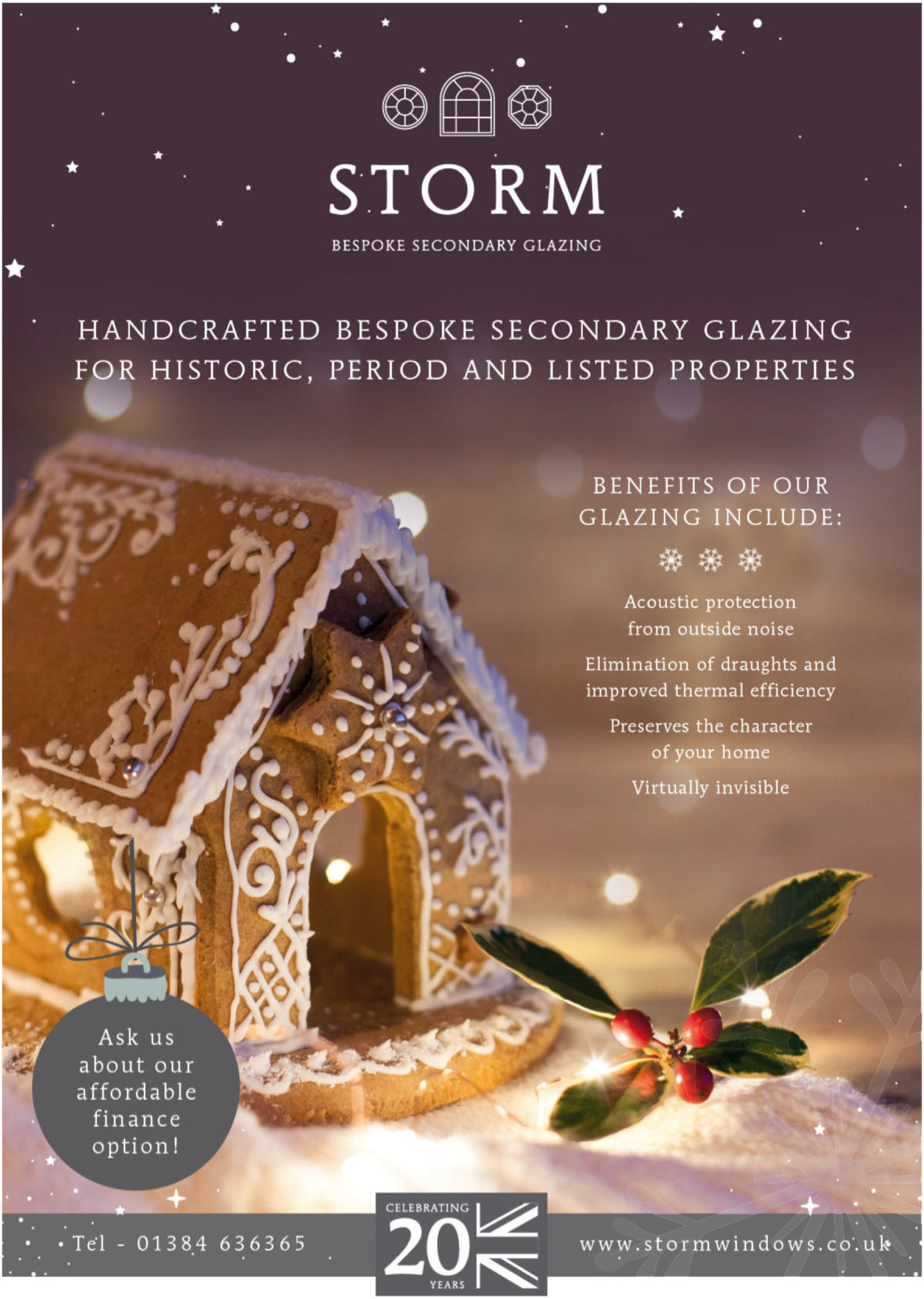






Above: Salvaged materials and old pine floorboards, which Frans laid himself, have helped to add character. The linen-covered chesterfield is from Trendhopper
Above right: Lara and Frans moved the stove so they could enjoy its glow in the living room. The antique mirror came from a French fleamarket and Lara made the wreath. The figurines are heirlooms and the candlesticks were a gift from a friend. The chair is another thrift shop find
Right: Propped on a side table is an old window frame that creates a pretty still life
Opposite: Lara and Frans bought the tall cupboard in France and found the perfect spot for it here among the other vintage treasures

F
L



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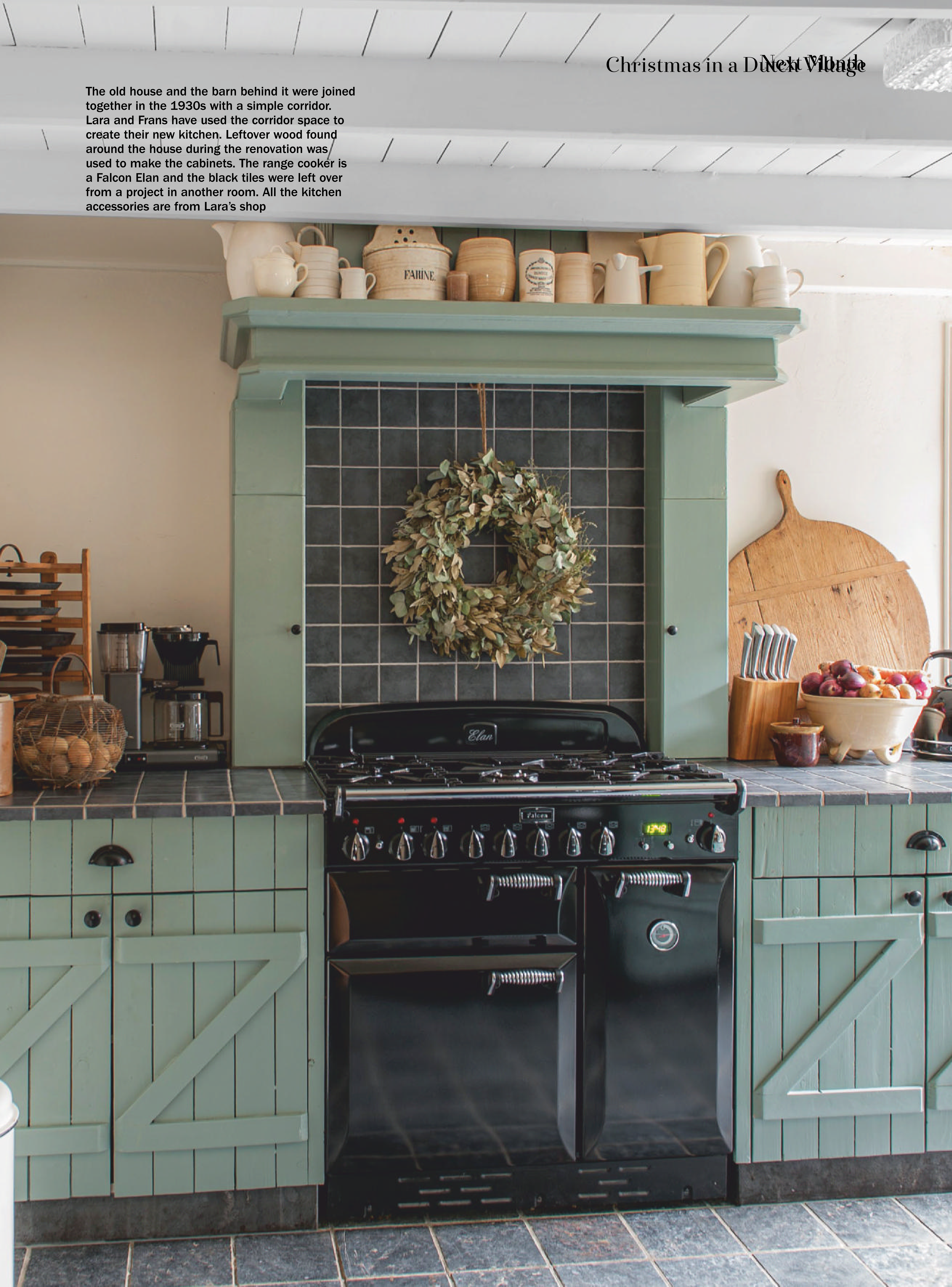

The old house and the barn behind it were joined together in the 1930s with a simple corridor. Lara and Frans have used the corridor space to create their new kitchen. Leftover wood found around the house during the renovation was used to make the cabinets. The range cooker is a Falcon Elan and the black tiles were left over from a project in another room. All the kitchen accessories are from Lara's shop

Above: The main bedroom still has its original floorboards. The iron bed is from Kwantum, and is dressed with Ikea bedding. The light is from Fauquemont Brocante
Above right: The pretty cast-iron bed in the spare room is an antique
Right: In a cosy corner with an old school desk and chair sits Lara's grandmother's old teddy

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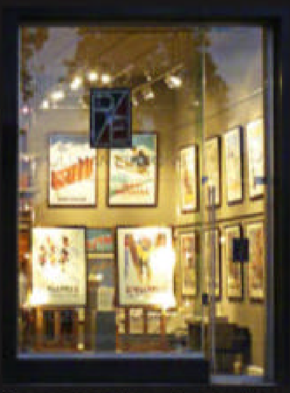
Our central London gallery

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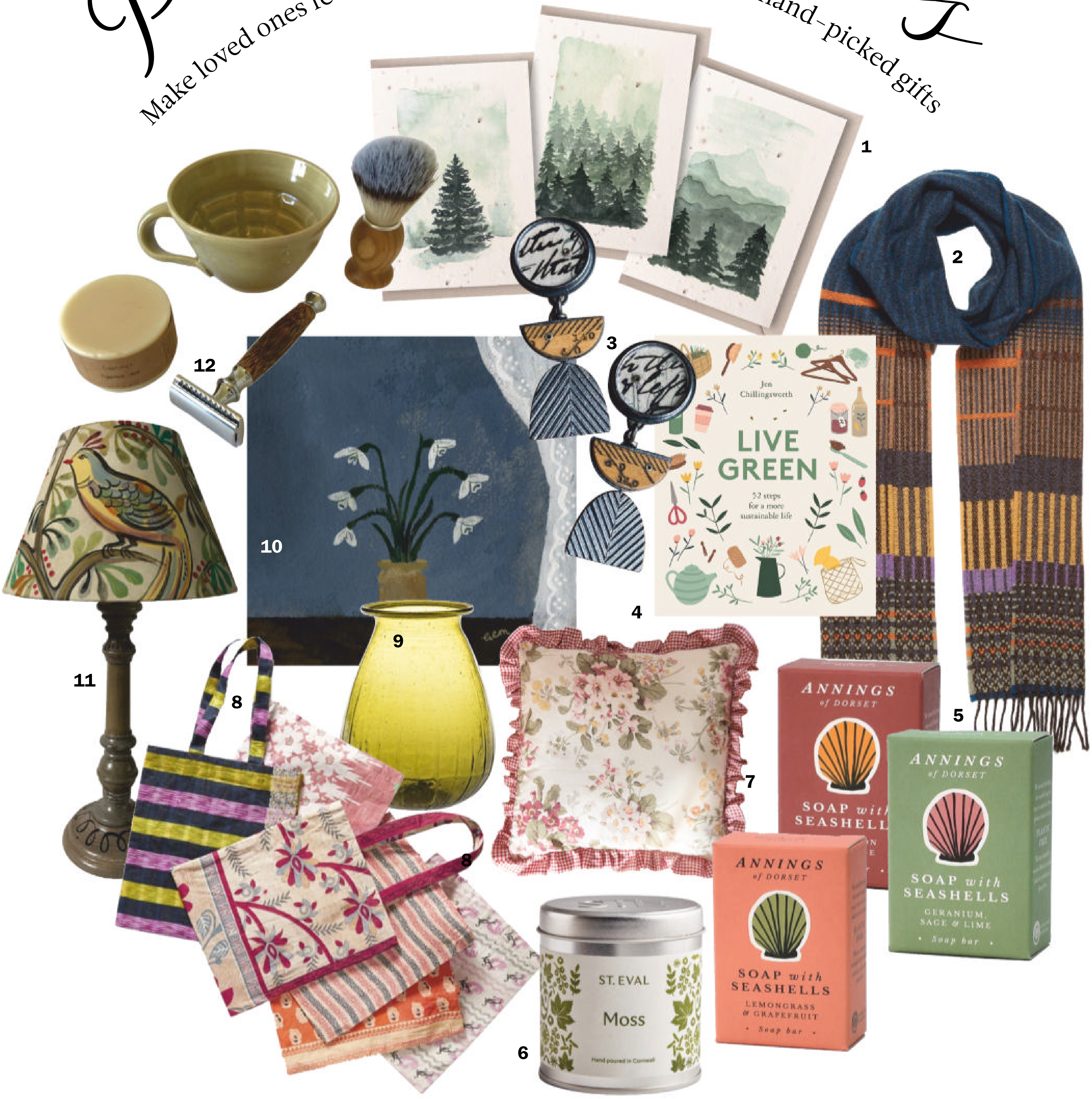
Perfect presents

Make loved ones feel extra special with our selection of hand-picked gifts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Jen Chillingsworth
LIVE GREEN
52 steps for a more sustainable life
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ANNINGS of DORSET
SOAP with SEASHELLS
GERANIUM, SAGE & LIME
Soap bar
LEMONGRASS & GRAPEFRUIT
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ST. EVAL
Moss
Hand poured in Cornwall
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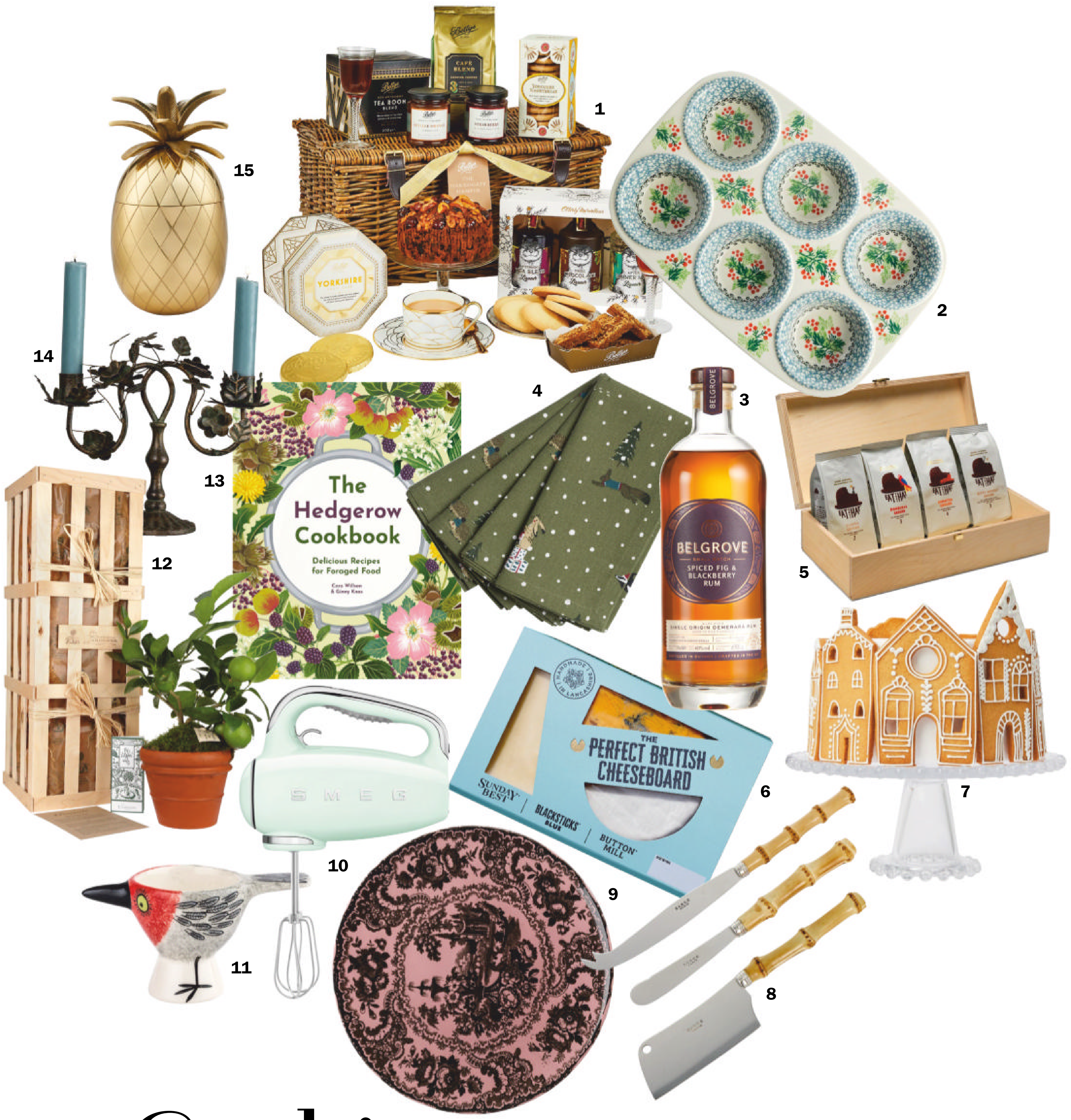
Green gifting

Choose thoughtful presents that tread lightly on the planet – from recycled textiles and homeware to jewellery crafted in Britain

1 Winter Pine plantable card set, £12, Ruby & Bo; **2** Wallace & Sewell British-made lambswool Anouilh scarf, £70, V&A Shop; **3** Handmade earrings combining oxidised silver with fragments of old postcards and rulers, £156, Clare Hillerby; **4** *Live Green* by Jen Chillingsworth, £8.99, Oh Curio; **5** Handmade soaps with sustainably collected seashells, £4.95 each, Annings of Dorset; **6** Moss scented tin candle made in Cornwall, £11.99, St. Eval; **7** Upcycled floral fabric cushion made in Devon, £45, Ian Snow; **8** Recycled sari bags, £5.99 each, Sourced by Oxfam; **9** Green recycled glass vase, £7, National Trust Shop; **10** Snowdrops print, H20xW20cm, £27, Gemma Koomen; **11** Small Dora lampshade, £68, with small wooden handpainted base, £70, Bloomsbury Revisited; **12** Luxury eco shaving set, £70, Rory & Ruby

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop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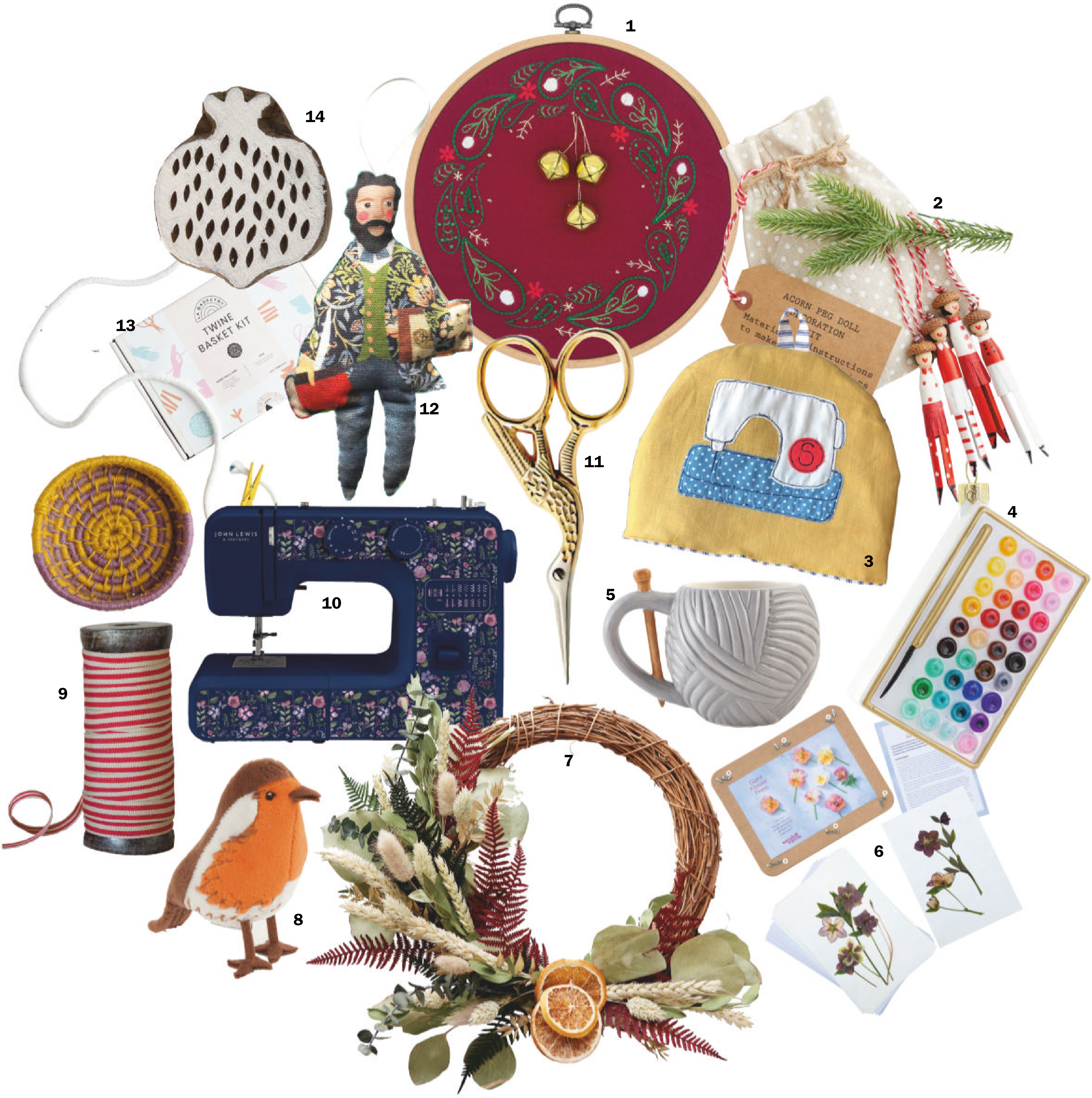
The Hedgerow Cookbook
Delicious Recipes for Foraged Food
BELGROVE
SPICED FIG & BLACKBERRY RUM
THE PERFECT BRITISH CHEESEBOARD
SMEG

Cooking up a treat

Tasty ideas and gifts for discerning foodies and star bakers, plus everything you need to serve up a celebration and eat, drink, and be merry

1 The Harrogate Hamper, £150, Bettys; **2** Hand-decorated wreath muffin tin, £47.50, Artisan Homeware; **3** Spiced Fig & Blackberry rum, 70cl, £29.95, Belgrove Rum; **4** Festive Forest napkins, £16.50 for 4, Sophie Allport; **5** Eat Your Hat fair trade, organic coffee gift set, £25, Traidcraft; **6** The Perfect British Cheeseboard letterbox selection, from £4, Butlers Farmhouse Cheeses; **7** Festive House biscuit decorating set, £25, Not on the High Street; **8** Bamboo handle cheese set, £75, Rebecca Udall; **9** Dusky Pink Sakura Cherry Blossom dinner plate, £14, Rockett St George; **10** Hand mixer in Pastel Green, £149, Smeg; **11** Handmade robin egg cup, £16, Hannah Turner Ceramics; **12** The Lemon Crate, lemon tree in terracotta pot with instructions and recipe, £49, The Gluttonous Gardener; **13** *The Hedgerow Cookbook* by Caro Wilson and Ginny Knox, £12.99, National Trust Shop; **14** Vintage Flowers candelabra, £34.95, and Venetian candle set, £10.95, Sarah Raven; **15** Gold pineapple ice bucket, £75, Royal Opera House Shop

Feature Karen Darlow

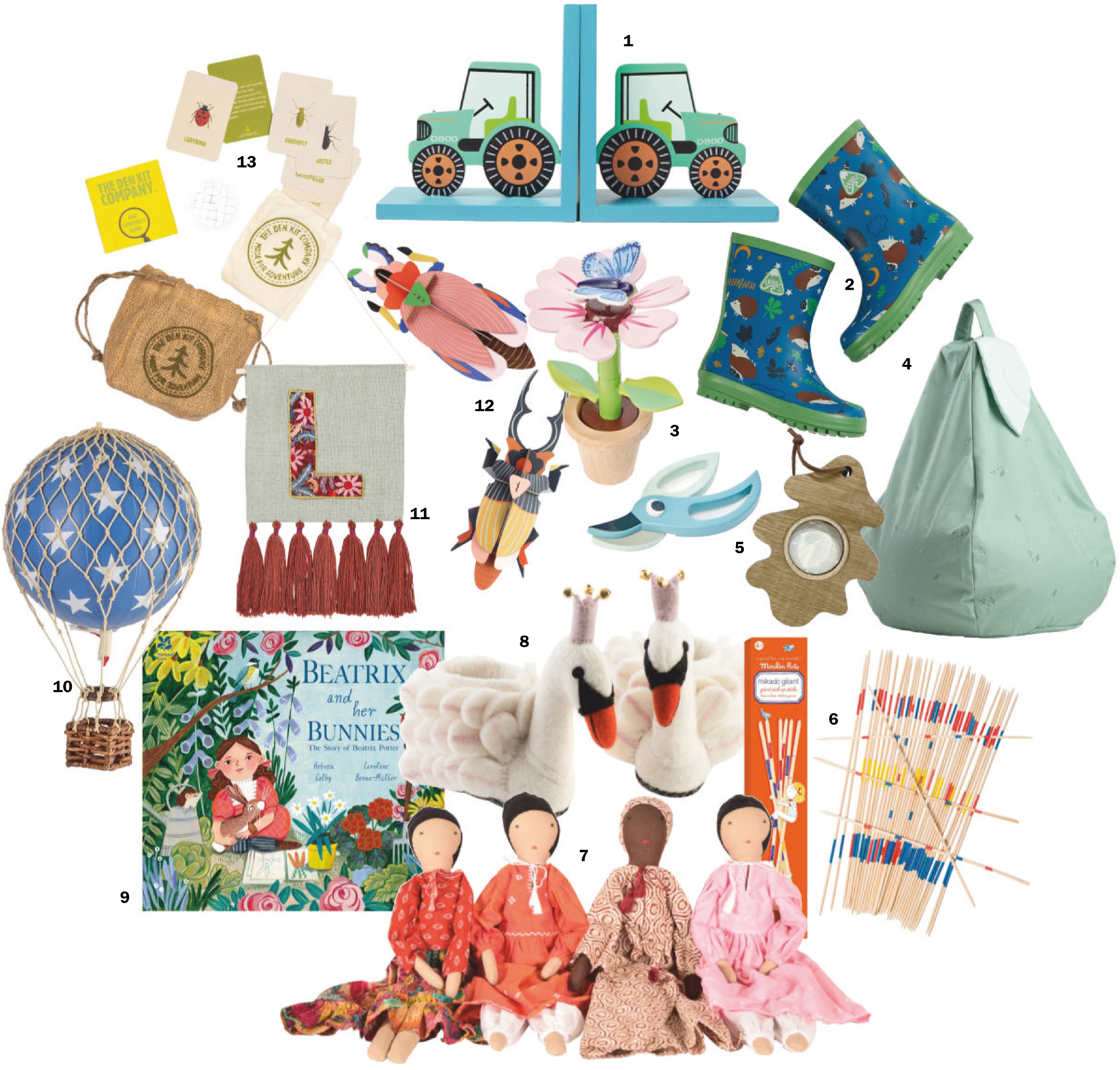


Creative collection

Find the perfect gift for the crafters in your life with these artistic projects, homeware and sewing supplies

1 Christmas embroidery kit, £22.50, Paraffle; **2** Acorn peg doll craft kit, £15, Paper Sam; **3** Sew Jolly tea cosy project, £16.50, Poppy Treffry; **4** Watercolour decoration, £12.95, The Hambledon; **5** Sew Thirsty knitting yarn mug in grey, £10.99, Sew Pro Crafts; **6** Giant flower press, £24.95, Sarah Raven; **7** Dried flowers and fruit Christmas wreath craft kit, £35, Mary Elizabeth Flowers; **8** Robin bird pincushion, £9.99, Crafting Outlet; **9** Stripe cotton ribbon in red and beech, £35, Susie Watson Designs; **10** Wildflower print sewing machine, £135, John Lewis & Partners; **11** William Whiteley & Sons embroidery stork scissors, £25, Sir Gordon Bennett; **12** William Morris Fabric Folk kit, £26, The Shop Floor Project; **13** Twine basket kit in purple/yellow, £26, La Basketry; **14** Pomegranate wooden printing block, £7.50, Molly Mahon

Feature Holly Reaney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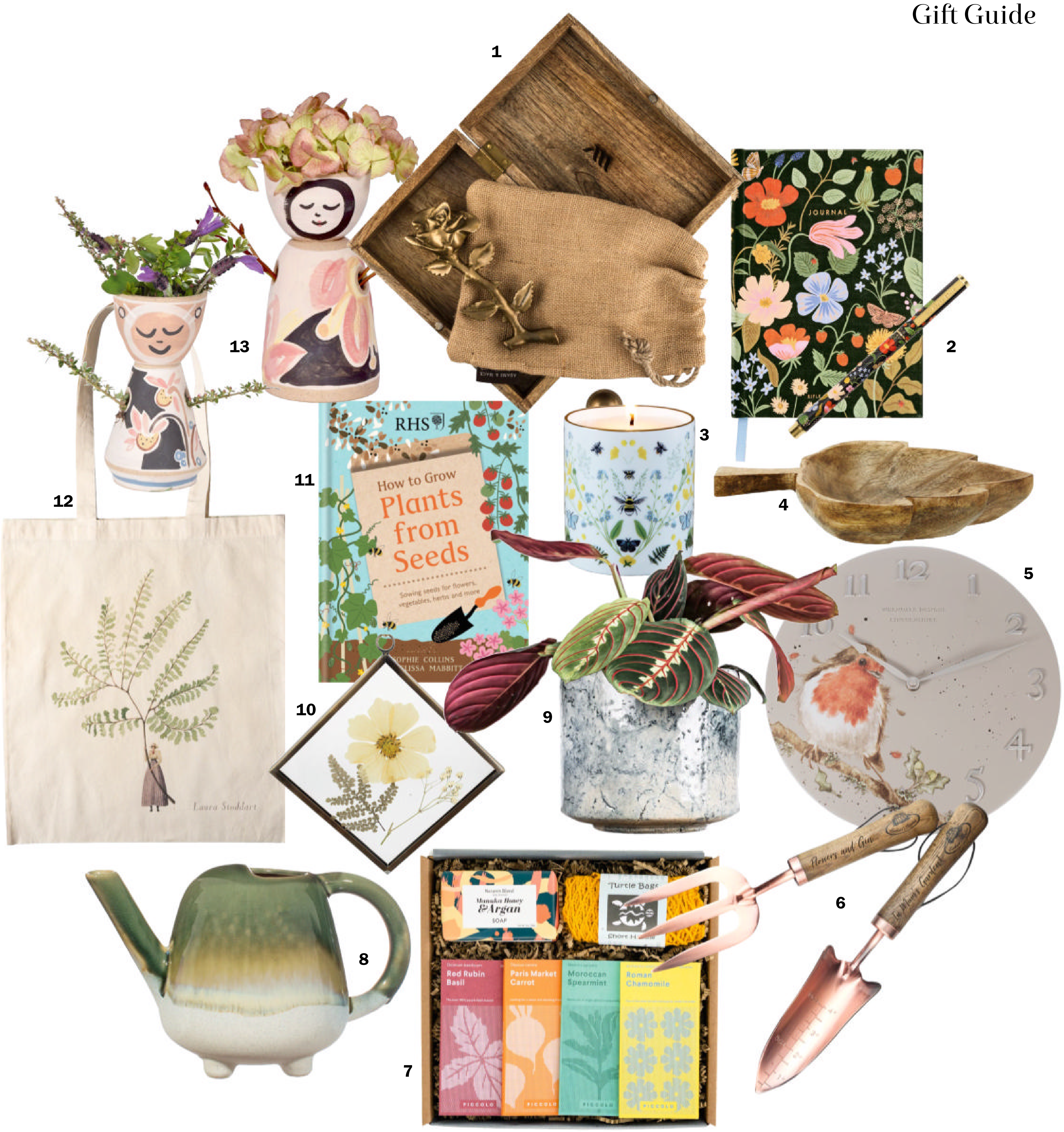
Moulin Roty
mikado géant
BEATRIX and her BUNNIES
The Story of Beatrix Potter
Rebecca Colby
Caroline Bonne-Müller
7
9

Small wonders

Bring joy to children – and the young at heart – with these special toys, room decorations and activities to keep them busy

1 Green tractor wooden bookends, £15, Beaumonde; **2** Frugi Nocturnal Explorers wellington boots, £28, National Trust; **3** Blossom wooden flowerpot set, £17.99, Dobbies; **4** Wigiwama Pear bean bag in Minty Green, £76, Amara; **5** Freckle Studio OakeyDokie oak magnifying glass, £16, Liberty; **6** Moulin Roty giant pick-up sticks, £10, Kidly; **7** SilaiWali rag dolls, handmade from recycled textiles, £40 each, Raj Tent Club; **8** Kids' Odette swan slippers, £26.95, Sew Heart Felt; **9** *Beatrix and Her Bunnies – The Story of Beatrix Potter* by Rebecca Colby and Caroline Bonne Müller, £6.99, Nosy Crow; **10** Authentic Models Floating the Skies small hot air balloon, £27.99, My Small World; **11** Lucy Freeman Design hand-embroidered letter wall hanging, £75, Not on the High Street; **12** Giant stag beetle and giant lady beetle recycled card 3D models, £15 each, Studio Roof; **13** Bug spotter kit, £9.50, The Den Kit Company

Feature Melanie Griffiths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How to Grow
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Seeds
Sowing seeds for flowers, vegetables, herbs and more
SOPHIE COLLINS
MELISSA MABBITT
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Laura Stoddart
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Manuka Honey & Argan
Turtle Bags
Red Rubin Basil
Paris Market Carrot
Moroccan Spearmint
Roman Chamomile

Gardeners' delights

Treat green-fingered friends and family with this selection of horticultural and nature-inspired presents

1 Handcrafted rose brass door knocker with keepsake wooden box, £132, Adams & Mack; **2** Rifle Paper Co Strawberry Fields cloth-bound journal, £24, and Strawberry Fields pen, £14, both Papermash; **3** British Hedgerow ceramic candle, £38, Lorna Syson; **4** Wooden leaf serving bowl, £20, Rose & Grey; **5** Woodland Robin wall clock, £42, Wrendale Designs; **6** Treat Republic personalised copper trowel and fork set, £44.99, John Lewis & Partners; **7** The Allotment – Sun's Out gift box of plant seeds, string bags, manuka honey and argan soap, £30, That Counts; **8** Ceramic dip ombré glazed mini watering can, £28, Ella James; **9** Plant subscription box, £35 per month, Leaf Envy; **10** Dried flower frame bauble, £14.50, Cox & Cox; **11** RHS *How to Grow Plants from Seeds* by Sophie Collins, £12.99, Mitchell Beazley; **12** Fabulous Ferns cotton bag, £8.50, Laura Stoddart; **13** Botanist vases, handmade by Emma Christmas for Poetware, £85 each, Raj Tent Club

Feature Rachel Crow

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(Height - 48.26 cm (19"). £640.00*

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(6514). Height - 86.36 cm (34"). £ 850.00*

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Height - 20.5 cm (8"). £290.00*

Good Sheraton Period Mahogany Tea Table.
(8691). Height - 74 cm (29 1/4"). £995.00*

Early 19th Century Neoclassical
Figure of a Young Woman. (182N).
Height - 23.5 cm (9 1/4"). £290.00*

Late 19th Century Stone China Enamelled Turkey Drainer
(7223). Width - 33.02 cm (13"). £280.00*

Unusual Early 20th Century Mahogany
Framed Mirror of Queen Anne Design.
(8640). Height - 72.5 cm (28 1/2"). £585.00*

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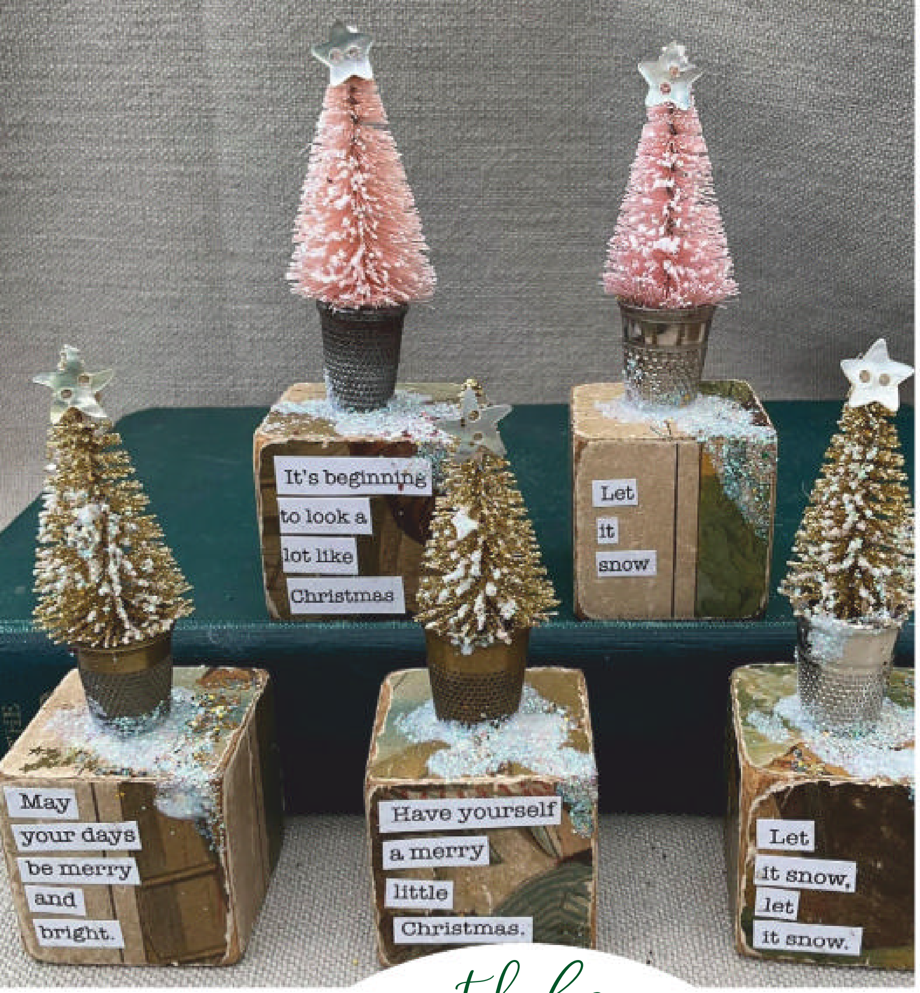
Antiques Journal

News from the antiques and vintage world, from fairs to collectors' stories



Made with love

Karen Lesley Vintage Interiors always delights us with her seasonal decorating and gift ideas, and these handmade bottle brush trees set in vintage thimbles are adorable. Mounted on children's building blocks complete with a festive message, a mother of pearl star and a sprinkling of glitter, they make the perfect mantle decoration or stocking filler, and are just £4 each. (karenlesleyvintageinteriors.com)

TALKING SHOP

The recently opened Verdigris House in York, set on the corner of Nunmill Street and Scarcroft Road, is a traditional-looking corner shop with a difference. With two eye-catching themed window displays and a carefully curated stock of beautiful antiques and accessories, this is a one-stop shop for decorative living inspiration. Choosing wares that perfectly match the season, the owners promise a Christmas shopping experience to warm both heart and home. (Instagram @theverdigrishouse)

Feature Alice Roberton Images (collector) tamsynmorgans.com

MEET THE COLLECTOR

CHRISTMAS BAUBLES

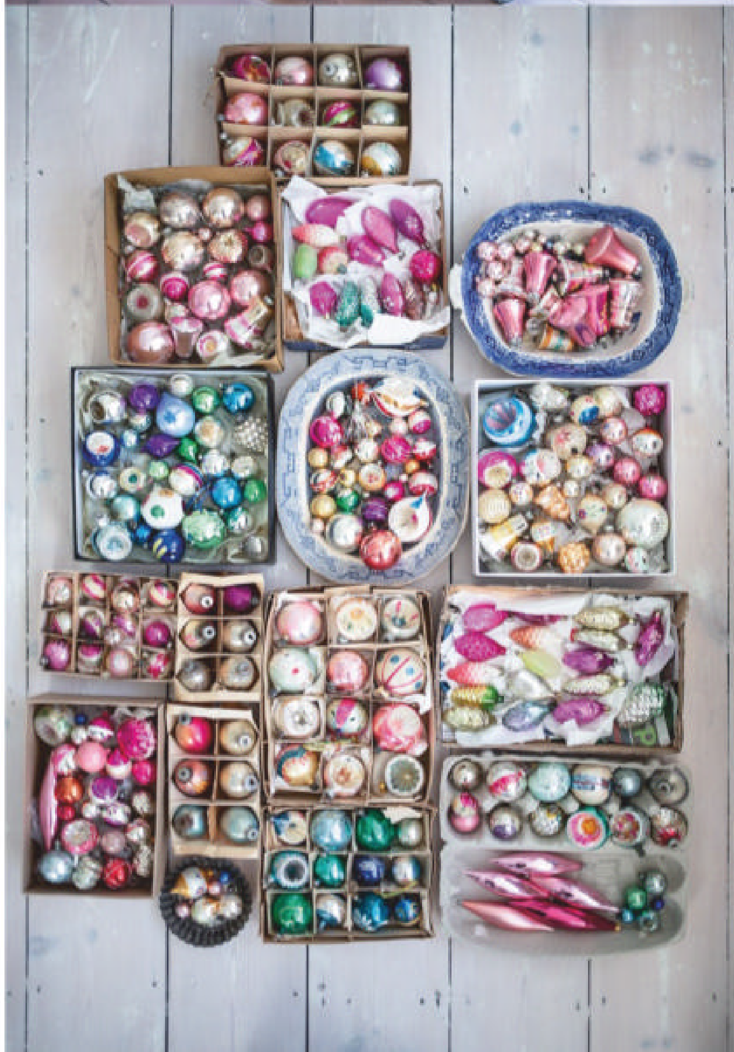
Tamsyn Morgans

What I collect: I obsessively collect antique and vintage mercury glass baubles dating from the 1930s to the 1980s. They come in a huge array of colours, shapes and designs, with my favourites being concave spheres, bells, fruits and walnuts, and those handpainted with flowers. Some later baubles border on kitsch, but I love the earlier ones for their faded colours and patina.

Why I collect: As a child I remember my family having three small pale pink baubles, which came from my grandmother. Years later I saw some in a charity shop; I bought them and used them to make a garland, and my obsession began. I love unwrapping the baubles each year to decorate my tree or using them in styling and photography work (tamsynmorgans.com) – they act like house jewellery and can be used in many ways.

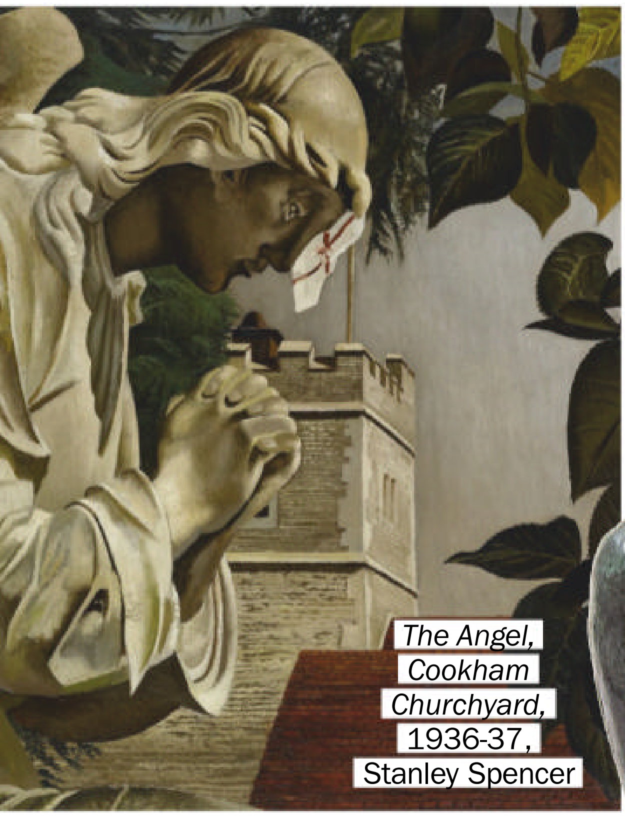
How I collect: Over the years I have found many in charity shops and at car-boot fairs, but I buy most on Ebay. In recent years they have been harder to get at bargain prices – their popularity and fragility make them expensive. I have around 200-250 baubles and have paid anything from 20p for a single, a few pounds for a bag, and up to £35 for a beautiful box.

My collection highlight: Without doubt it's a tray of conical baubles shaped like gherkins, leaves and pine cones in shades of silver, ice grey and pale pink. My research suggests they may be Eastern European and fairly rare.

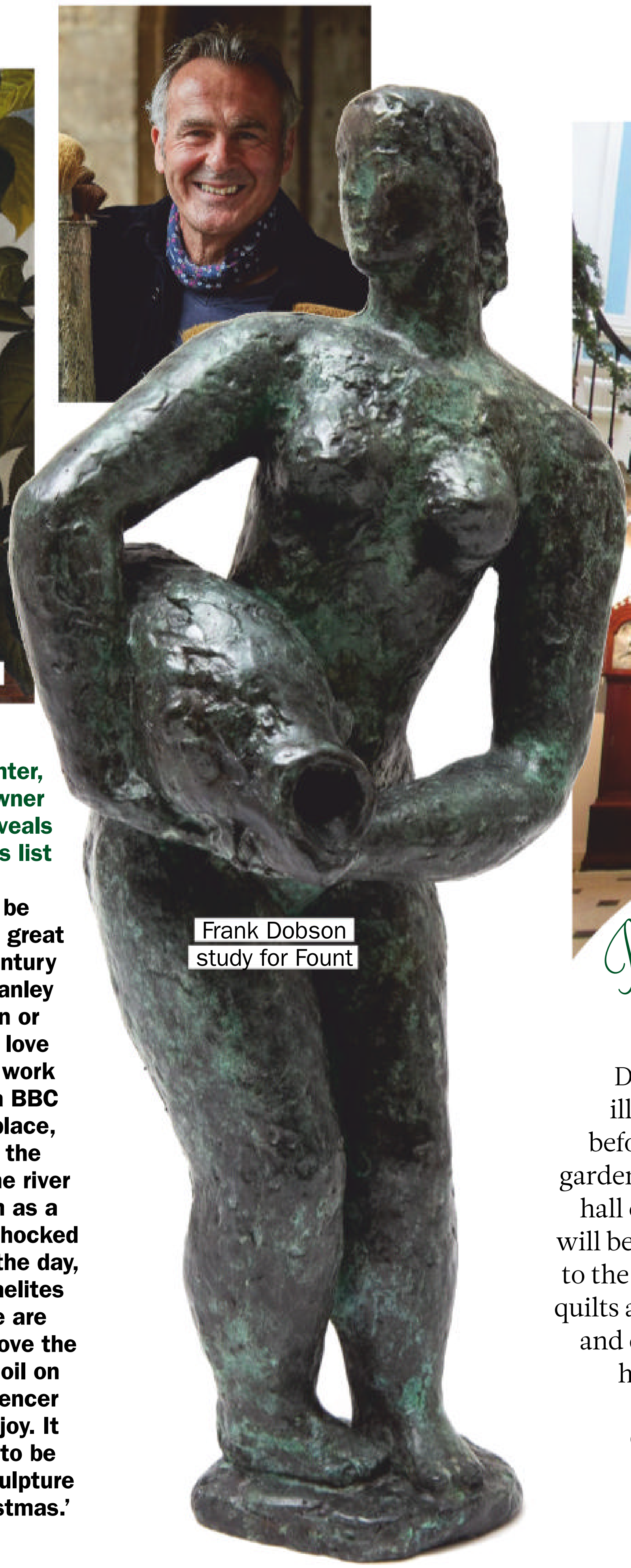


FUN OF THE FAIR

Across the first two weekends in December, MK Handmade & Vintage will be hosting a festive takeover at Northamptonshire's Rushden Lakes shopping centre. Running down the central boulevard, the fair will showcase a jolly roster of more than 60 antique and vintage traders, independent makers, artisans and food vendors. Rich pickings will include pre-loved homeware, affordable art, teddy bears, tableware and linen, plus a good offering of handmade gifts. (mkhandmadeandvintage.co.uk)



The Angel, Cookham Churchyard, 1936-37, Stanley Spencer



Frank Dobson study for Fount

WISH LIST

Paul Martin, TV presenter, antiques dealer and owner of The Table Gallery, reveals what's on his Christmas list

'Top of my list would be something by one of the great icons of British 20th-century modern art, such as Stanley Spencer, Frank Dobson or Walter Sickert. I fell in love with Stanley Spencer's work 15 years ago while on a BBC filming trip to his birthplace, home, and museum in the village of Cookham on the river Thames, and regard him as a pioneer and genius that shocked the art establishment of the day, much like the Pre-Raphaelites did. Colour and texture are close to my heart, and I love the boldness and energy of oil on canvas, so owning a Spencer would bring me eternal joy. It would be a big ask but to be gifted a Frank Dobson sculpture would complete my Christmas.'

The central hall of the manor house complete with its traditional 17ft Nordman fir Christmas tree

All lit up

Bath's American Museum & Gardens, the leading museum of Americana outside the United States, will be hosting a Christmas illuminations trail from 9-31 December. The Enchanted Garden of Light will illuminate the dramatic hillside setting as never before, with a sparkling route winding through the gardens and parkland. As is tradition, the main entrance hall of the museum, set in the 1820 Claverton Manor, will be fully decked out, giving visitors a festive welcome to the permanent collections of folk and decorative arts, quilts and cultural objects. You can also enjoy festive food and drink stalls offering roasting chestnuts, gourmet hotdogs, spiced apple and hot chocolate. Plus, there'll be a chance to indulge in a spot of Christmas shopping at The Christmas Coach House. Visit americanmuseum.org to book tickets in advance.

FESTIVE PREP

With Christmas almost here, why not go online to source antique and vintage gifts, decorations and entertaining ideas? We've rounded up three of the best websites to explore

DECORATIONS: If you're planning a vintage-themed Christmas or just hoping to add a touch of nostalgia to festivities, head to **Handmade & Vintage** for a great range of retro and kitsch decorations, and vintage Christmas card bunting. The website features a dedicated Christmas section, where you'll find yesteryear magic and inspiration galore. (handmadeandvintage.co.uk)

ENTERTAINING: From ice buckets and champagne glasses to bar trolleys and silverware, **House of Hummingbird** offers up an excellent range of hand-selected and perfectly polished items for entertaining. Its website is easy to navigate with clear categories and a click and buy system, so you'll be serving up stylish drinks in no time at all. (houseofhummingbird.co.uk)

GIFTS: With its range of highly affordable and original gift ideas, **The Urban Vintage Affair** has the vintage lovers in your life covered. Offering collections such as 'Luxury Gift Ideas for Men under £50' and 'Eco Gifts for Home Workers' and a handy four-part payment plan, this is Christmas shopping made easy. *(theurbanvintageaffair.com)*

TO WISH YOU
A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS
XMAS
WISHES
Jolly

Handmade cotton 1950s-1960s Christmas card bunting, £19, Handmade & Vintage

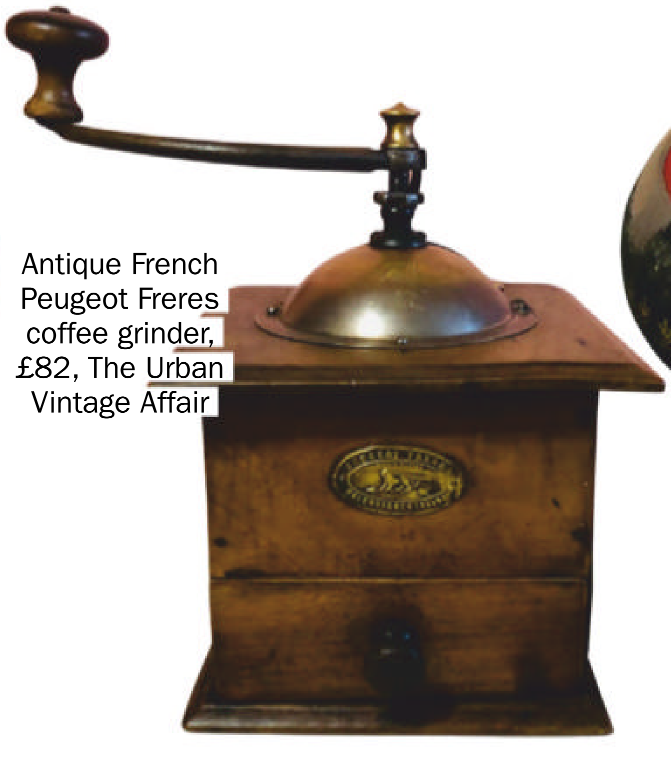
1930s wooden tree decorations, from £15 each, Handmade & Vintage

Pixie decorations, c.1960/1970s, £5 each, Handmade & Vintage

Decorative nest of trolley tables by Maison Baguès, c1950s, £1,050, House of Hummingbird

French vintage crackle glazed ice bucket with tongs, £140, and Art Deco gilt shot glasses, £132 for a set of 11, all House of Hummingbird

Antique black lacquer paper mâché letter rack, £58, The Urban Vintage Affair



Antique French Peugeot Freres coffee grinder, £82, The Urban Vintage Affair

Antique black lacquer papier mâché round box, £47, The Urban Vintage Affair

Images (opposite) *The Angel, Cookham Churchyard*, 1936-37, Stanley Spencer, private collection; on long term loan to the Stanley Spencer Gallery; Frank Dobson Study for Fount © Goldmark Gallery and credited to Jay Goldmark; (tree) © American Museum & Gardens

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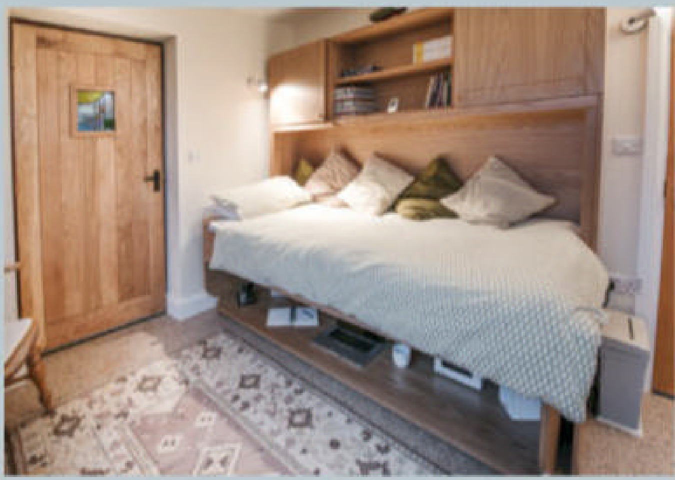

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Festive merriments

Immerse yourself in Christmas cheer by visiting one of these spectacular Yuletide events

Feature Holly Reaney

Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

As winter draws in each year, Chatsworth is transformed into a wonderland, capturing the essence of Christmas and bringing it to life with elaborately themed decorations. 2021 marks two decades of this magical tradition and to celebrate, the house is bringing back its favourite and most elaborate designs. From fairy-tale dreams and storybook characters to celebrations from around the globe, each room will be a riot of colour, music and drama. 6 Nov – 9 Jan; entry, adult, £26; child, £15. (chatsworth.org) ➤

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SEASON'S FELICITATIONS

Victorian Christmas at Blists Hill, Ironbridge

The Victorians are seen as the inventors of the modern-day Christmas, shaping many popular traditions – from trees and wreaths to cards and carols. Discover the stories behind these much-loved festive rituals as you step into the Victorian town of Blists Hill, which offers an immersive experience of life in the 19th century. Hear tales of the residents' preparations, enjoy the beautiful traditional decorations, don skates and take to the ice, then sample traditional festive treats from the bakery and sweet shop. Select dates between 27 Nov and 2 Jan; entry adult, £20; child, £13. (ironbridge.org.uk)

Gingerbread City Exhibition, London

Sugar, spice and all things nice are the order of the season in Belgravia this year, as a miniature city, crafted entirely from gingerbread, will be erected and showcased at one of its pop-up venues. The gingerbread city is the brainchild of architects, designers and engineers, and this year is centred around the idea of nature in the city. Trading concrete and glass for dough, sweets and icing, enjoy this awe-inspiring masterpiece of edible buildings. 4 Dec – 9 Jan; entry adult, £14; child, £8.50. (thegingerbreadcity.com)

Image (Gingerbread City) Luke O'Donovan

Lauriston Castle, Edinburgh

It was only in 1958 that Christmas became a public holiday in Scotland, but that didn't stop it from being a celebration. Take a trip back to 1910 from the comfort of your own home, as Edinburgh Living History brings an Edwardian Christmas to life in a virtual tour of Lauriston Castle. Each room tells part of the tale, from the conflicts over the commercialisation of Christmas, to the English effect on the Protestant values of the Scottish people. Every scene is designed to be as historically accurate as possible and is combined with family drama and a good dose of humour. History has never been so captivating. 5 Dec; free (edinburghmuseums.org.uk) ➤

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THE GUILD OF MASTER CRAFTSMEN

Belvoir Castle, Grantham

Passing through the grand threshold of Belvoir Castle, you'll find yourself whisked into a world of cordial Regency grandeur. Dressed for celebrations fit for a queen, the house has been frozen in time, depicting scenes of glamorous balls and intimate suppers. The air is filled with magic, and it is as if the house is waiting for guests to arrive so that the party can finally begin. From 15 Nov – 2 Jan; entry, adult, £21; child £12. (belvoirchristmas.com)

Carols by Candlelight, Fountains Abbey in Ripon

The air will be filled with song and light at Fountains Abbey's Carols by Candlelight event, housed in the atmospheric ruins of one of England's best preserved Cistercian monasteries. Over 1,000 flickering flames and the harmonies of beloved carols will bring to life the cellarium, with its atmospheric archways. The event will brighten even the darkest evening and cannot fail to fill the heart with festive cheer. 5 & 12 Dec; entry, adult, £17; child, £8.50. (nationaltrust.org.uk)

Image (Fountains Abbey) ©National Trust Images/Chris Lacey

Strawberry Hill, Twickenham

There are hundreds of Christmas markets taking place up and down the country, but Strawberry Hill promises a special experience. Offering toys, cards, delicious food, jewellery and accessories crafted by over 40 artisan makers and designers, it is the perfect place to kick-start your Christmas shopping. Alongside the fair, Horace Walpole's magical neo-gothic castle is also playing host to The Décorcafé, where you can sign up for how-to demonstrations. Be inspired by amazing ideas from leading designers on how to style your own home into a winter wonderland. 27 – 28 Nov; entry, adult, £7.50 (£16 including festive demos). (strawberryhillhouse.org.uk) ➤

The Nutcracker Ballet at St David's Hall, Cardiff

As the clock strikes midnight on Christmas Eve, the magic begins to unfold on stage at St David's Hall when the Russian State Ballet brings the story of *The Nutcracker* to life. Find yourself shrunk down to the size of a toy, as Tchaikovsky's Mouse-king battles the Nutcracker Prince in a bewitching display of dance, costume and scenery, combining to tell the captivating tale of Clara's magical present. 20 – 24 Dec; entry, adult from £19.50; child from £9.75. (stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk)

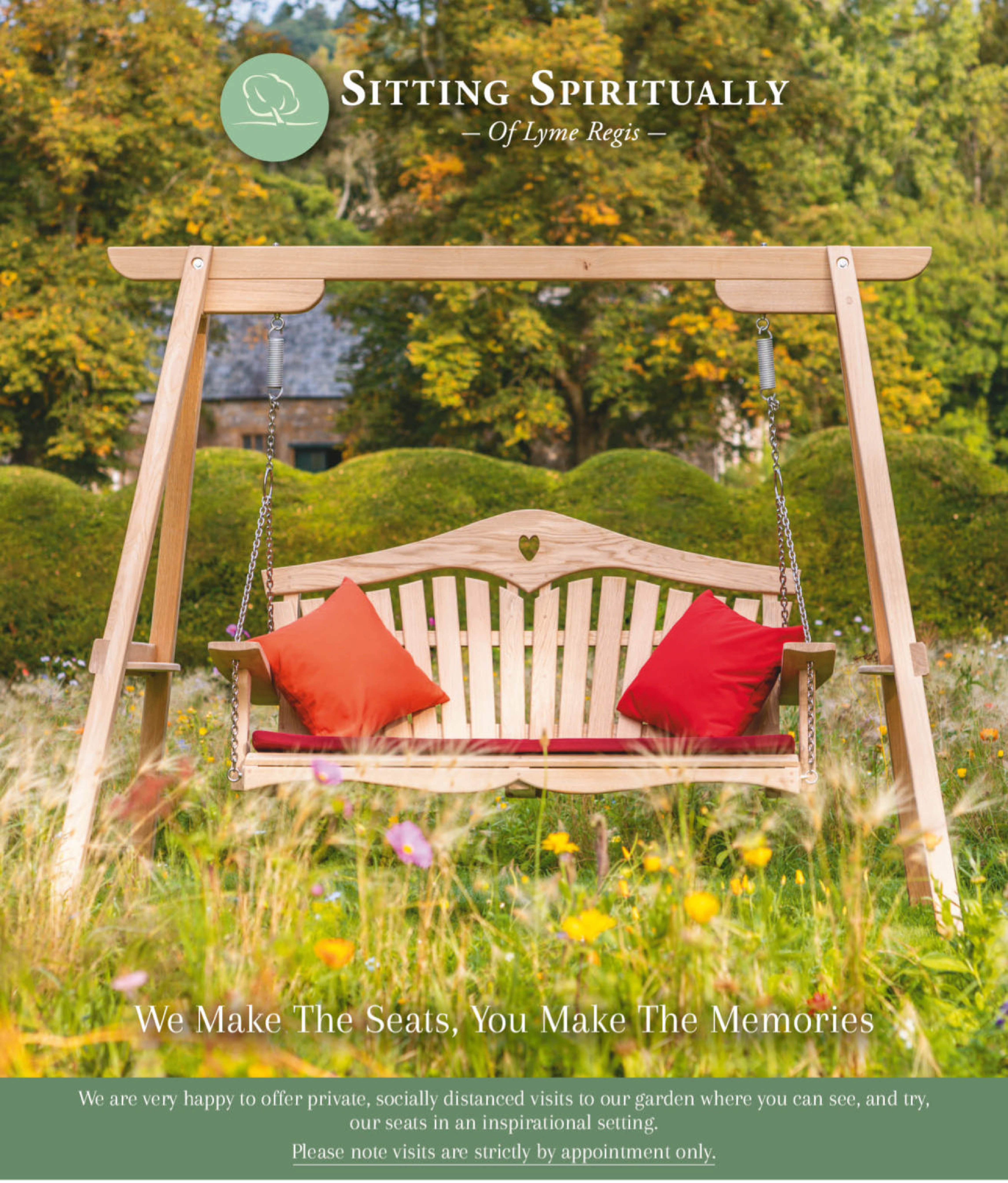
The Child in the Snow at Wilton's Music Hall, London

Fancy exploring the darker side of Christmas? Building upon the success of its show-stopping performance of *A Christmas Carol* in 2019 and *The Box of Delights* in 2020, Wilton's Music Hall presents *The Child in the Snow*, a new play based on Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Old Nurse's Story*. A seasonal ghost story, not suitable for those of a more nervous disposition, it is sure to delight lovers of chilling tales. The plot is equal parts haunting and thrilling, as we follow a nurse who, having returned from war in 1918, finds herself at a séance where dark secrets and long forgotten memories bubble to the surface once more. 26 Nov – 31 Dec; entry, adult from £12.50. (wiltons.org.uk)

Kew Gardens, Richmond

Every year this UNESCO World Heritage site is inundated with visitors wishing to delight in its renowned collection of flora. However, come winter, visitors flock for an altogether different experience. As the sun sets, the gardens come alive, illuminated by over a million twinkling lights across its vibrant installations and buildings. Projection mapping and video design gives Kew's archived botanical illustrations a new life, while a 15-metre-wide dome of light sits on a reflective water pool to create a mirrored illusion, and a clever design in the Holly Walk will illuminate the night sky for over 200 metres overhead, replicating the enchanting aurora borealis. 17 Nov – 9 Jan; entry, adult from £21.50; child from £14. (kew.org) PL

Images (Wilton's Music Hall) Getty Images; (Kew) RBG Kew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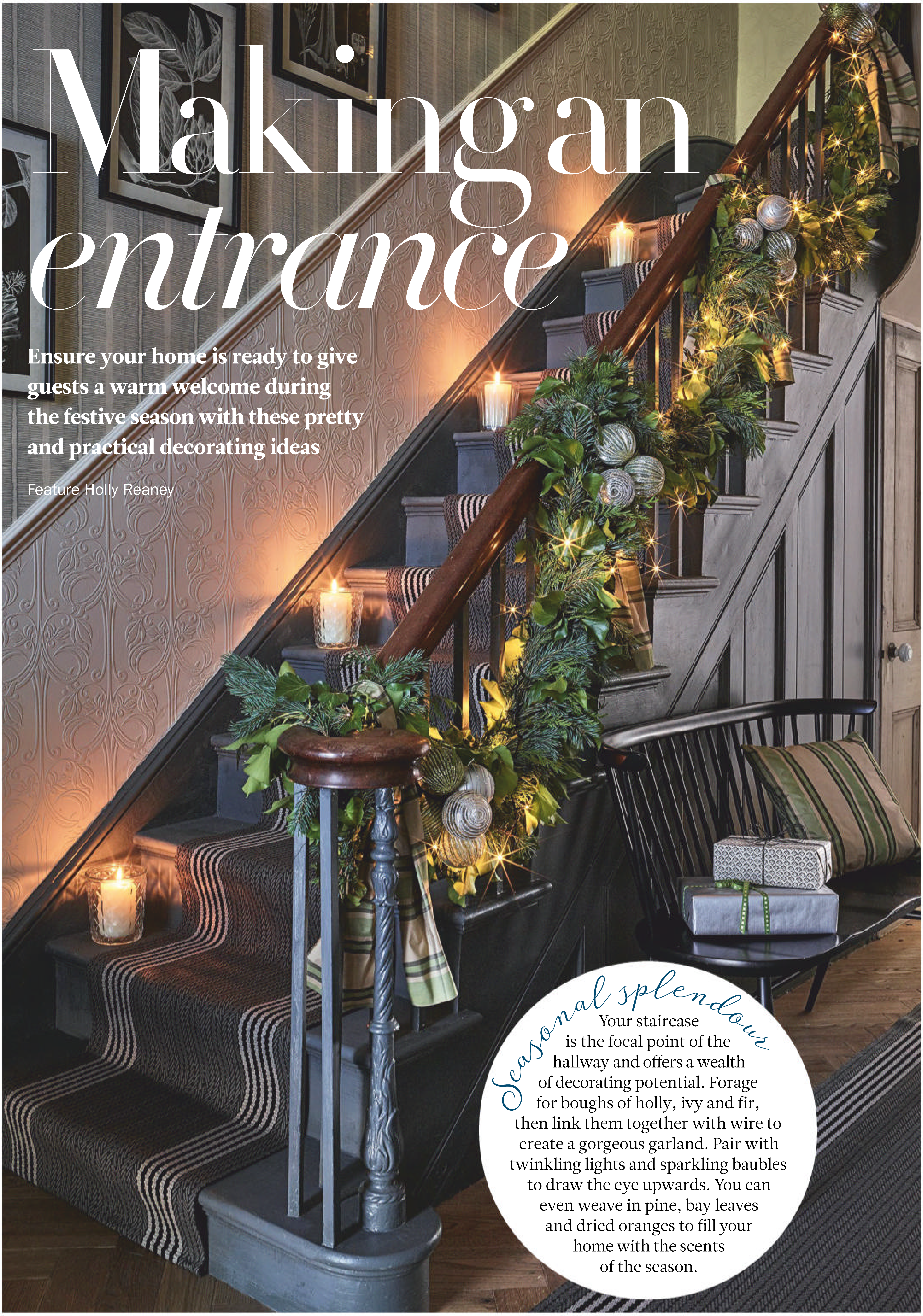


Making an *entrance*

Ensure your home is ready to give guests a warm welcome during the festive season with these pretty and practical decorating ideas

Feature Holly Reaney

Seasonal splendour

Your staircase is the focal point of the hallway and offers a wealth of decorating potential. Forage for boughs of holly, ivy and fir, then link them together with wire to create a gorgeous garland. Pair with twinkling lights and sparkling baubles to draw the eye upwards. You can even weave in pine, bay leaves and dried oranges to fill your home with the scents of the season.

Image Chris Everard

Deck the halls

First impressions count, and as the first space guests see, the hallway sets the tone for the house beyond. Banisters, console tables and door frames all present opportunities for festive embellishments that will ring in the Yuletide spirit.

Keeping your hallway tidy is key to creating a welcoming atmosphere all year round. However, with so many people coming and going, this gets harder in the run up to Christmas. Make sure you have somewhere to store coats and shoes, and take luggage to bedrooms as soon as guests arrive.

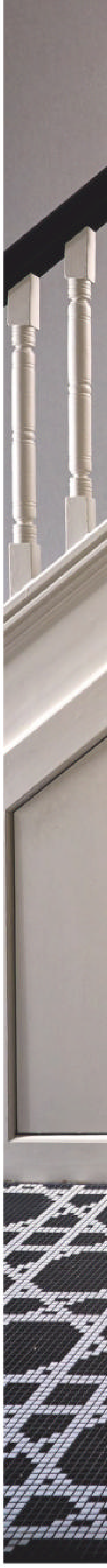
Yuletide kisses

Add a romantic touch above your front door with this mistletoe decoration with golden leaves and pearl berries, £39, Curated Living.

MAGICAL DISPLAY

Give your console table the festive treatment with an array of lights and foliage. A carefully draped garland provides the perfect backdrop for faux candles and special Christmas cards. Crafted from real wax, Lights4Fun's Tru-Glow candles, from £26.99, are nearly identical to the real thing, but without the risks associated with a lit flame. Combine varying heights and position in front of a mirror to reflect the beautifully flickering lights back into the room.

NEAT AND TIDY
There is nothing less welcoming than facing an obstacle course of coats and shoes as you step into the hallway. Avoid this by creating a dedicated storage space. A row of vintage hooks adds visual interest and somewhere to hang coats and scarves, while an open storage bench provides space to keep shoes as well as a spot to sit while getting ready. Try Cotswold Company for a similar bench.



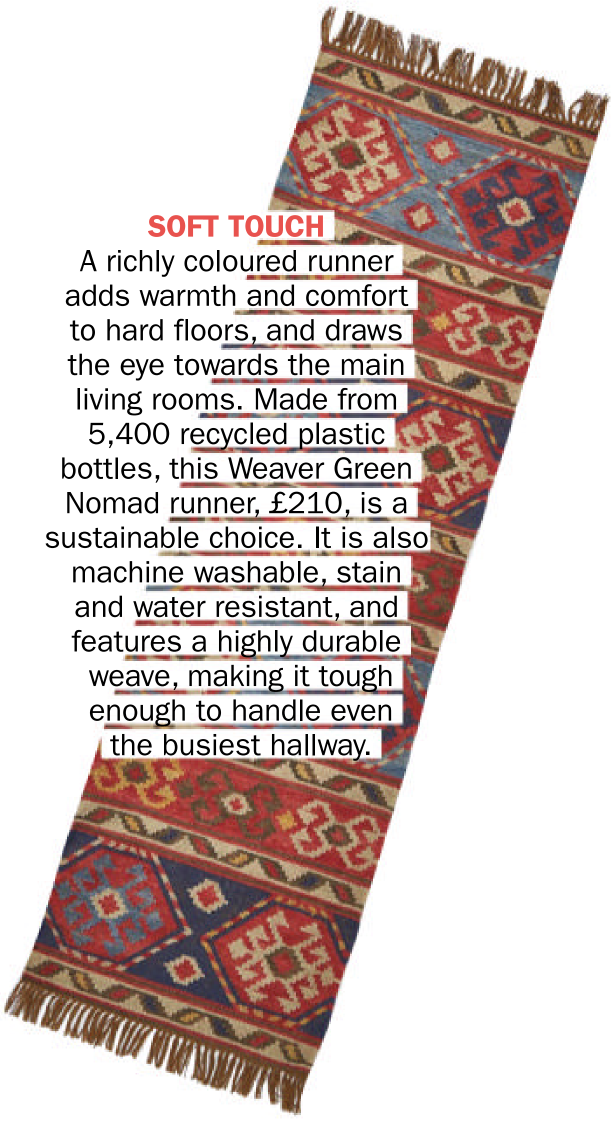
Pull up a pew

Perfect for smaller hallways, this Gotisk bench, £299.95 from The House Office, makes the most of a compact footprint. As well as serving as a spot for putting on those challenging winter boots, the bench's lift-up seat provides a hidden space to store outdoor essentials. Crafted from sustainable mango wood, it is easy to decorate in tune with the season: add red and gold cushions and a woollen blanket for winter.

Image (hallway with blue door) Mark Scott

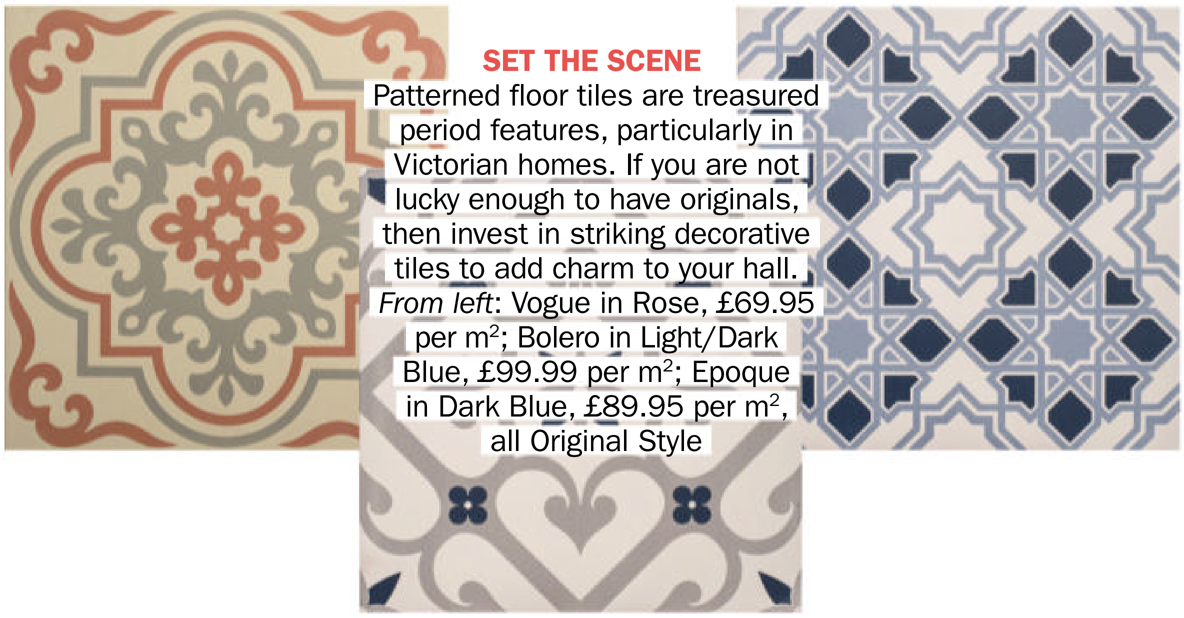
Oh, Christmas tree

Nothing heralds the start of the festive season quite like a real tree. This six-foot Nordmann fir, £87 from Croft & Cole, makes the perfect warm welcome when decorated with twinkling lights and golden baubles. Plus its needles are non-drop, so you won't need to constantly sweep them up.



SOFT TOUCH

A richly coloured runner adds warmth and comfort to hard floors, and draws the eye towards the main living rooms. Made from 5,400 recycled plastic bottles, this Weaver Green Nomad runner, £210, is a sustainable choice. It is also machine washable, stain and water resistant, and features a highly durable weave, making it tough enough to handle even the busiest hallway.



SET THE SCENE

Patterned floor tiles are treasured period features, particularly in Victorian homes. If you are not lucky enough to have originals, then invest in striking decorative tiles to add charm to your hall. *From left*: Vogue in Rose, £69.95 per m²; Bolero in Light/Dark Blue, £99.99 per m²; Epoque in Dark Blue, £89.95 per m², all Original Style

LET IT GLOW

Hallways are often dark spaces, with limited natural light coming through glazing in and around the door. Therefore, fitting the right lighting is key to creating a welcoming ambience. This Glasshouse Opal Art Deco pendant in brass, £590 from Soho Lighting, features aged opaque glass, which diffuses light to create an inviting atmosphere.

Warm welcome

The front of your house is always on display, so share some festive cheer with guests and neighbours by adding a few magical touches. As well as decorating your home, it is essential to keep on top of general maintenance to make visitors feel welcome and avoid accidents. In anticipation of the inclement winter weather, lay grit on your pathway and remove slippery leaves and fallen snow. For more advice on keeping your home in top condition during winter, see page 114.

Festive foliage

If you are looking for something different to the traditional wreath, take inspiration from across the pond and decorate your door with a festive swag, which offers a more relaxed look. You can make your own by gathering twigs, berries and winter foliage, and tying together with a ribbon. Alternatively, purchase a ready-made design, such as this outdoor-safe Pine Peak Christmas swag, from £89 at Balsam Hill.

GRAND OPENING
Updating your front door can give your entire home a facelift. If you have an incongruous uPVC design or your original wooden door is beyond repair, consider upgrading it with a new, efficient design. London Door Company offers authentic styles to suit homes from different eras. Otherwise, update a tired front door with a fresh coat of paint. Choose an exterior finish in a shade that will look great in every season. For a similar paint to the one used here, try Little Greene's Dorchester Pink Intelligent exterior eggshell.

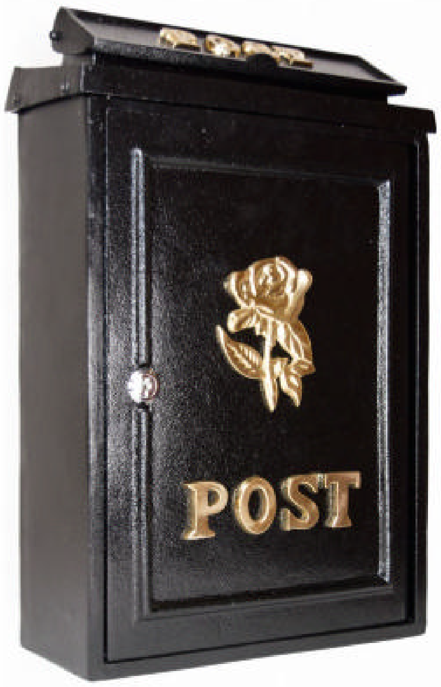
Knock, knock

This magnetic stag head door knocker, £49.50 from Nkuku, is a characterful yet practical addition to your front door. Cast from solid iron with an antique brass finish, it instantly blends into a period home.

Image (exterior with red door) Rachel Whiting

Dressed to impress

Protected from the elements, your porch is full of decorating potential. Set the scene with a garland and statement wreath. Pile up logs, ready for burning on the stove, and fill a basket with foliage waiting to be crafted into garlands and displays. Don't forget to add a seat so you can pause to take in the magic.



LETTERBOX GIFTS
With parcels, presents and cards all winging their way through the postal service, make sure you have somewhere safe for your deliveries. Cast in Style's Rose wall-mounted post box, with gold detailing, £65, will give your home's exterior a dose of nostalgia.

Light the way
As December heralds the shortest day, an outdoor light is a must. Not only will it serve as a beacon for visitors while waiting on the doorstep, but it will also prove invaluable when you are trying to find your keys. This Canterbury lantern in antique brass is inspired by Victorian carriage designs and costs £604 from Jim Lawrence.

BRUSHING UP
Winter weather comes hand in hand with muddy footwear. A boot scraper, like this cast-iron scraper and brush, £32 from Dibor, is a great way to ensure that no dirty footprints get traipsed into your home.

STEP INTO CHRISTMAS
Even without a porch, you can still give your home's exterior the festive treatment – just make sure that your décor is suitable for use outdoors. Pot up a Christmas tree in this zinc-lined planter, and pair it with a eucalyptus berry wreath on the door – both £85 from Marquis & Dawes – creating a wintry ambience that will survive even the chilliest weather.

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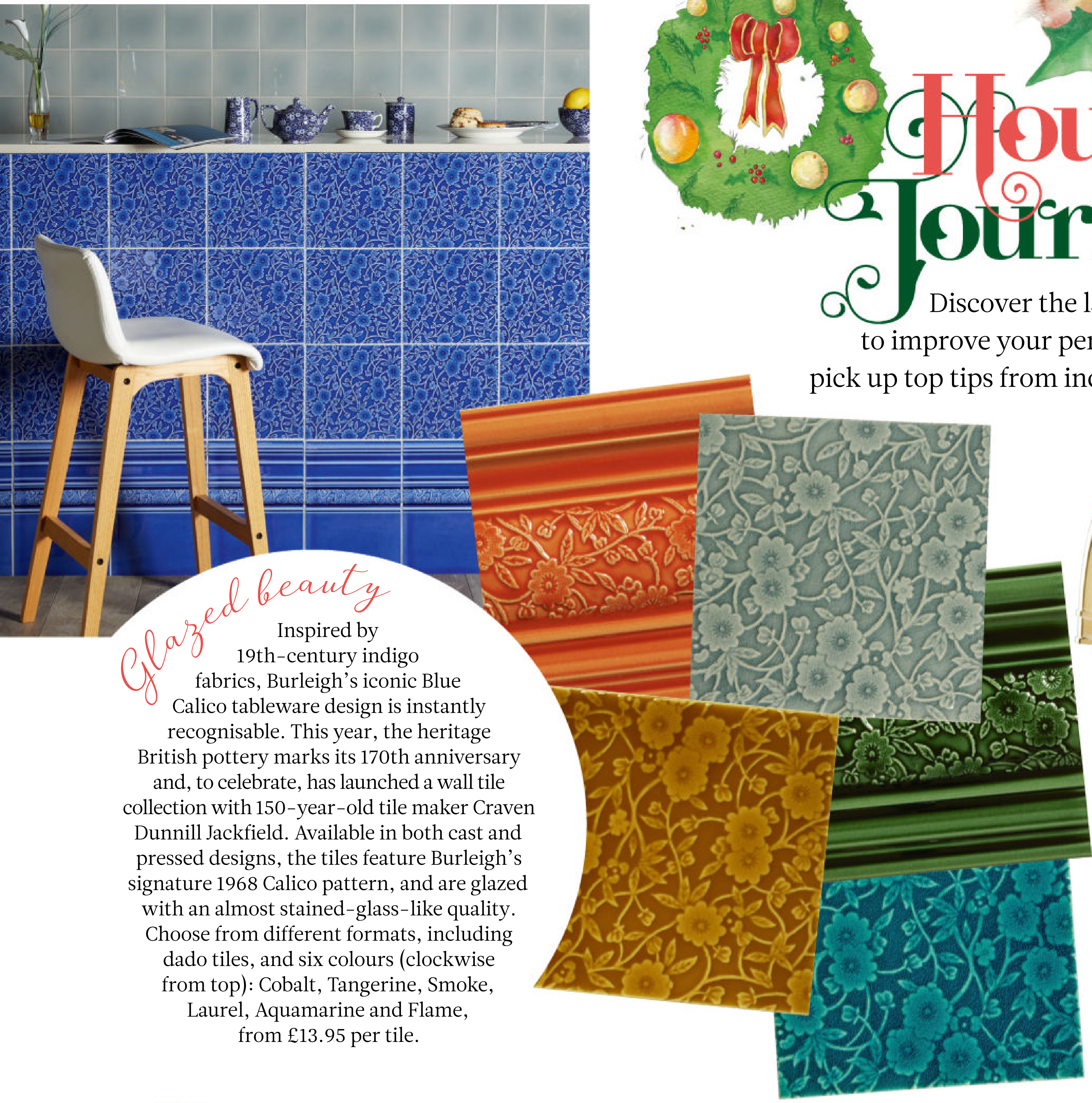

Glazed beauty

Inspired by 19th-century indigo fabrics, Burleigh's iconic Blue Calico tableware design is instantly recognisable. This year, the heritage British pottery marks its 170th anniversary and, to celebrate, has launched a wall tile collection with 150-year-old tile maker Craven Dunnill Jackfield. Available in both cast and pressed designs, the tiles feature Burleigh's signature 1968 Calico pattern, and are glazed with an almost stained-glass-like quality. Choose from different formats, including dado tiles, and six colours (clockwise from top): Cobalt, Tangerine, Smoke, Laurel, Aquamarine and Flame, from £13.95 per tile.

GO WITH THE FLOW Aiming to combine beauty and functionality, Perrin & Rowe has added a new kitchen tap to its industrial-style Armstrong range. The new 3-in-1 instant hot and filtration tap, from £1,443, is a kitchen must for the eco-conscious. Its boiling water functionality removes the kettle from the worktop and prevents energy wastage, since it only boils the water needed. Complete with anti-scale lever, the tap also features cold filtration technology, so you will never need to buy another plastic bottle of water. Like the original range, the taps are available in eight finishes, including chrome, nickel, satin brass and English bronze.

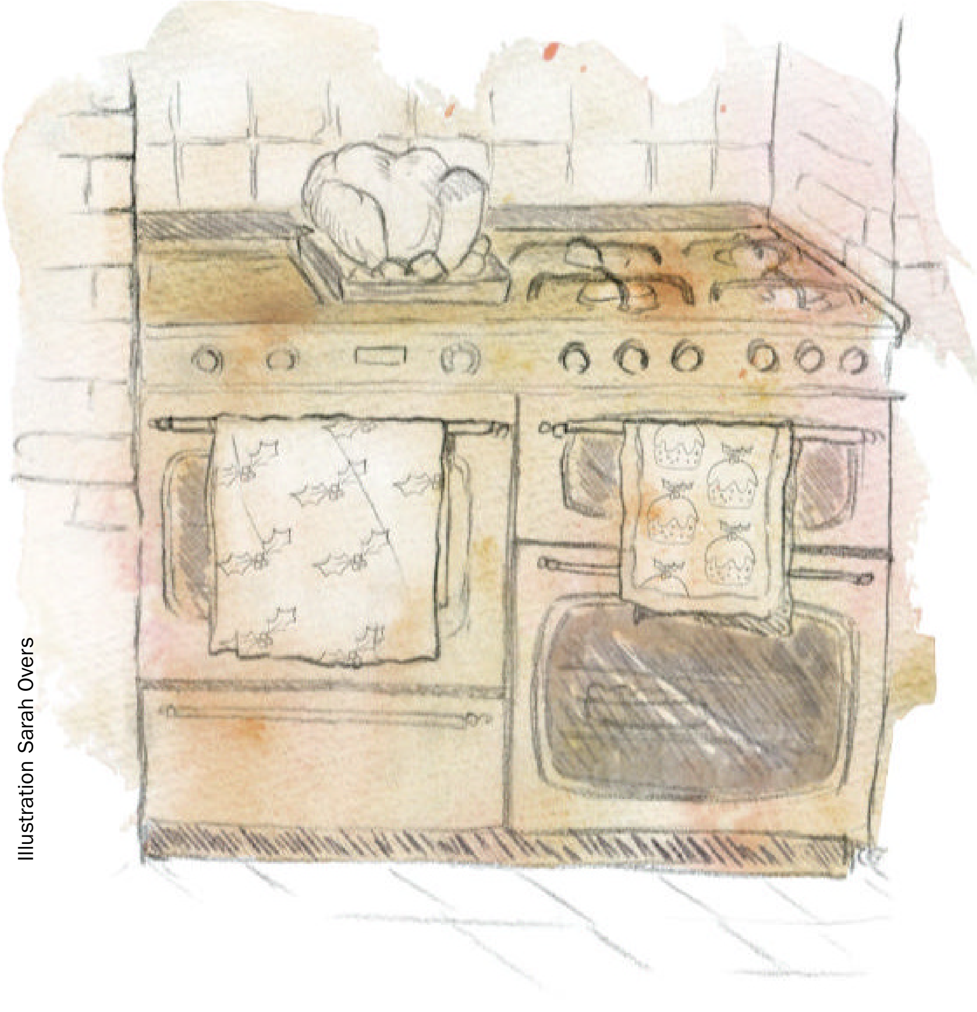

Illustration Sarah Overs

A BRIEF HISTORY OF...

RANGE COOKERS

The story of the modern range cooker began in the 1790s, when scientist Sir Benjamin Thompson designed a cast-iron cooker with an oven and open holes for pots, which could be covered when not needed. This design was much more efficient and safer than open fires, but it was too large for domestic use – though it was used commercially. Designs continued to develop and in 1830 William Flavel exhibited his Leamington Kitchener design at the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace. Built from cast iron, it was heated by solid fuel and could bake and boil while also warming a home. The next major development came in the 1920s, when Swedish inventor Dr Gustav Dalen designed the original Aga. Introduced in the UK in 1929, it was only retired in 2017, and has since inspired a multitude of designs and become a kitchen icon.

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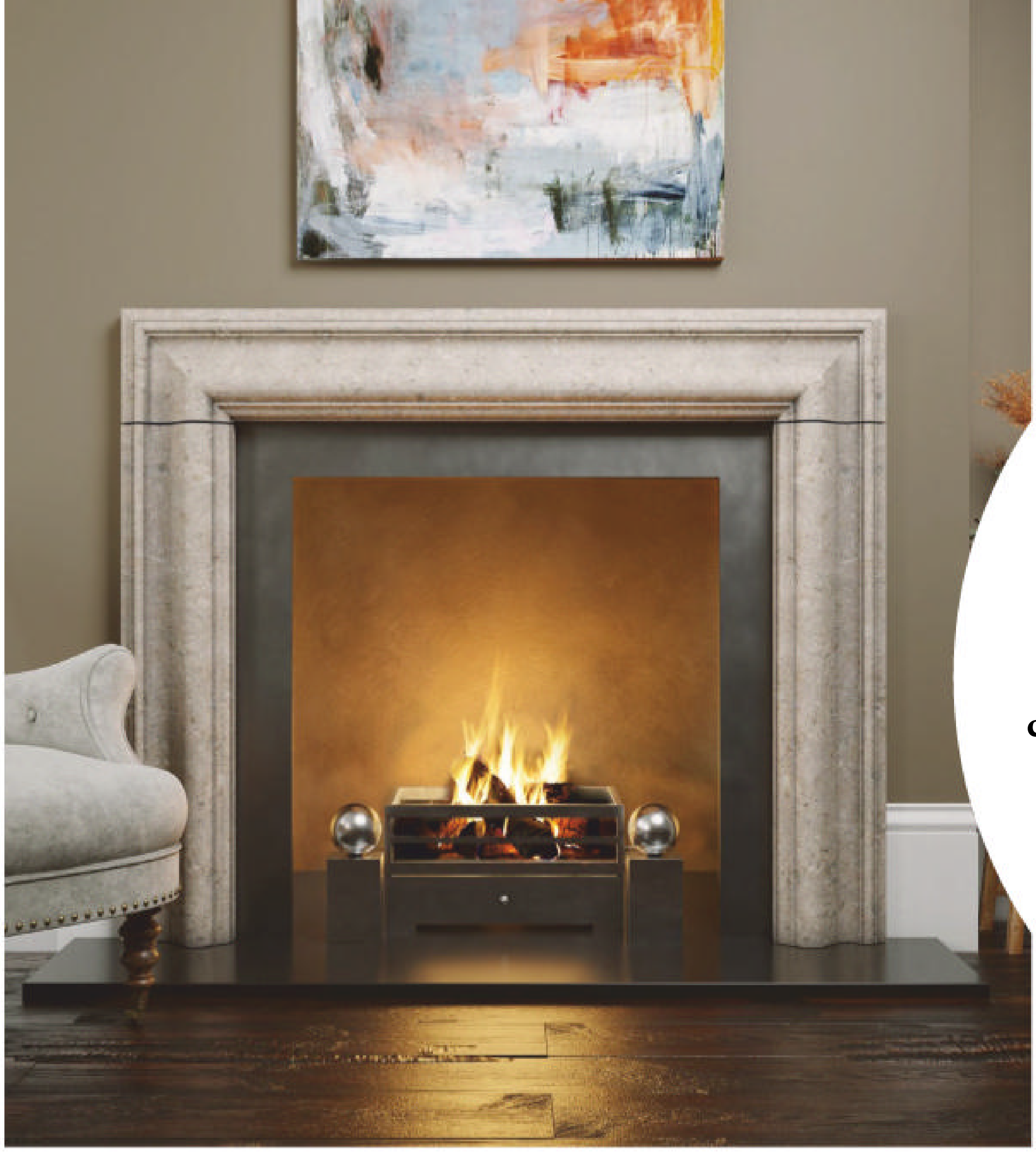


Burning bright

Shining a light on the beauty of the natural world, Chesneys' new British Materials fireplaces collection utilises the exquisite stones and marbles that are quarried from England, Wales and Scotland. Working in conjunction with Britannicus Stone, Chesneys has created a stunning range of fire surrounds that celebrates these unique and vibrant textured stones. Shown here, the Chedworth chimneypiece is crafted from English Portland stone and features inset panels of Derbyshire quarried Ball Eye Blue. It has been paired with a slate hearth, Soho polished steel fire basket and an Alchemy bioethanol log fire. Priced from £2,111.

Words of *wisdom*

Gareth Lowe, director at Nigel Tyas Ironwork, shares expert advice on how to design your lighting scheme to create the perfect dinner party ambience

CREATE A WELCOMING FIRST IMPRESSION. Use spotlights and wall lights to create a serene backdrop, which will set the tone for the space. Then add accent lighting to key features of décor around your dining room. Install picture lights over paintings or period features, point spotlights towards oak beams, and use ceiling lights to illuminate side tables filled with desserts and wine.

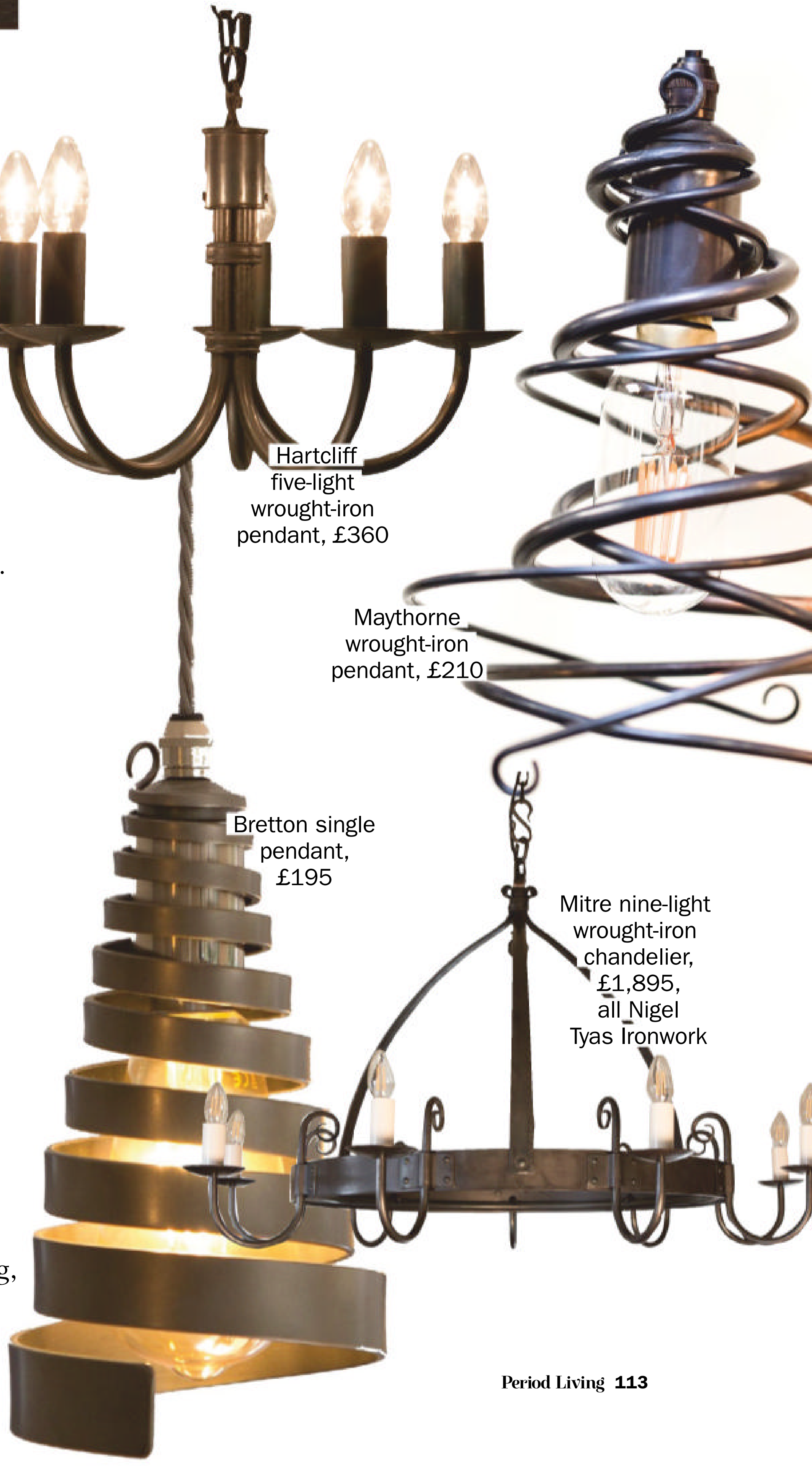
PICK YOUR CENTRAL LIGHTING CAREFULLY. The way you light the table is integral to the look and feel of your dining experience and will accentuate the table setting below. Choose a beautiful, quality light for this key position in your home. Think about shape, size and the distribution of the bulbs. The right design will pull the whole room together and draw the eye to this central point.

BE BOLD WITH YOUR LIGHTING. Chandeliers are a timeless choice and can be traditional or more contemporary in style. Their multiple arms lend themselves to decoration with seasonal garlands, too. Pendant lights can be hung in rows above a long table or in a central cascade above a round table for maximum impact.

CUSTOMISE LIGHTING FOR THE PERFECT FIT. Choose lighting which suits the height, width and length of your dining space. Pendants and chandeliers can both be made-to-order in different sizes with drops to suit any height of ceiling.

CONSIDER HOW THE NUMBER OF GUESTS WILL AFFECT THE LIGHTING. Make sure that there aren't any dark spots, particularly on the table. Don't forget that lamps can move – put them in key positions if needed. Candles are also an atmospheric way to add more lighting to tables and sideboards.

THINK ABOUT NATURAL LIGHT. If your guests are arriving in daylight, consider how you'll adjust your lighting to suit the mood. Invest in dimmable light fittings and bulbs, smart lighting, or timers on lamps to help you control the illumination.



Hartcliff five-light wrought-iron pendant, £360

Maythorne wrought-iron pendant, £210

Bretton single pendant, £195

Mitre nine-light wrought-iron chandelier, £1,895, all Nigel Tyas Ironwork

Winter *fixes*

Douglas Kent, technical and research director at the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), gives tips on preparing your home for cold weather

It is worth taking action now to reduce the likelihood of frost or snow damage to your old house. Doing so will not only protect your building but reduce the cost of repairs in the long run:

INSULATE WATER PIPES and cold storage tanks. This prevents them from freezing and bursting, especially if they are outside or in unheated areas. Consider relocating particularly vulnerable pipework if possible or apply electric heating tape.

ENSURE ADEQUATE HEATING. If your house is unoccupied for a couple of days, set the heating to run continuously at low level (about 18˚C). Be sure to service your boiler when due. Should the heating be left off during longer periods of absence, drain the hot and cold water system (but leave any supply for fire-fighting still functioning). Otherwise, protect central heating systems with antifreeze chemicals and by installing a frost thermostat.

FIND THE MAIN STOPCOCK. You can then turn off your water quickly in the event of an emergency. The stopcock is typically beneath the kitchen sink. Isolate the water supply to outside taps during cold snaps if unused.

CLEAR SNOW FROM PARAPET and valley gutters (minding your own safety). This stops moisture seeping through joints. Use wooden or plastic shovels. Alternatively, duckboards or electric heating tapes can be provided to keep gutters clear of snow. Snow guards fitted near eaves reduce the risk of snow or ice breaking away and damaging glass in roofs below.

ENSURE THAT SALT is not spread onto the bottoms of walls when gritting adjacent paths and roads. Salt contamination can hasten significantly the deterioration of mortar joints, brick and stone.

CONTROL DAMPNESS. This will minimise damage from freezing and thawing cycles that affect wet masonry or unfired earth, for example, by maintaining weatherings to exposed elements, such as chimneys, parapets and copings. Keep rainwater fittings clear of debris to avoid ice forming and causing a blockage.

MOVE STATUES and other garden ornaments that are vulnerable to frost indoors. If they are difficult to move, insulate with a temporary covering.

DRY YOUR WINDOWS each morning, to clear any condensation that has formed overnight. This will prevent moisture damage to paintwork, and timber or metal frames. An absorbent cleaning block is handy for this job.

*If you have a renovation question for Douglas, please email periodliving@futurenet.com**

Feature Holly Reaney *We do our best to answer all queries, but cannot guarantee a response Images (exterior blue door) Malcolm Menzies (exterior polariod) Polly Eltes (window) Mark Bolton

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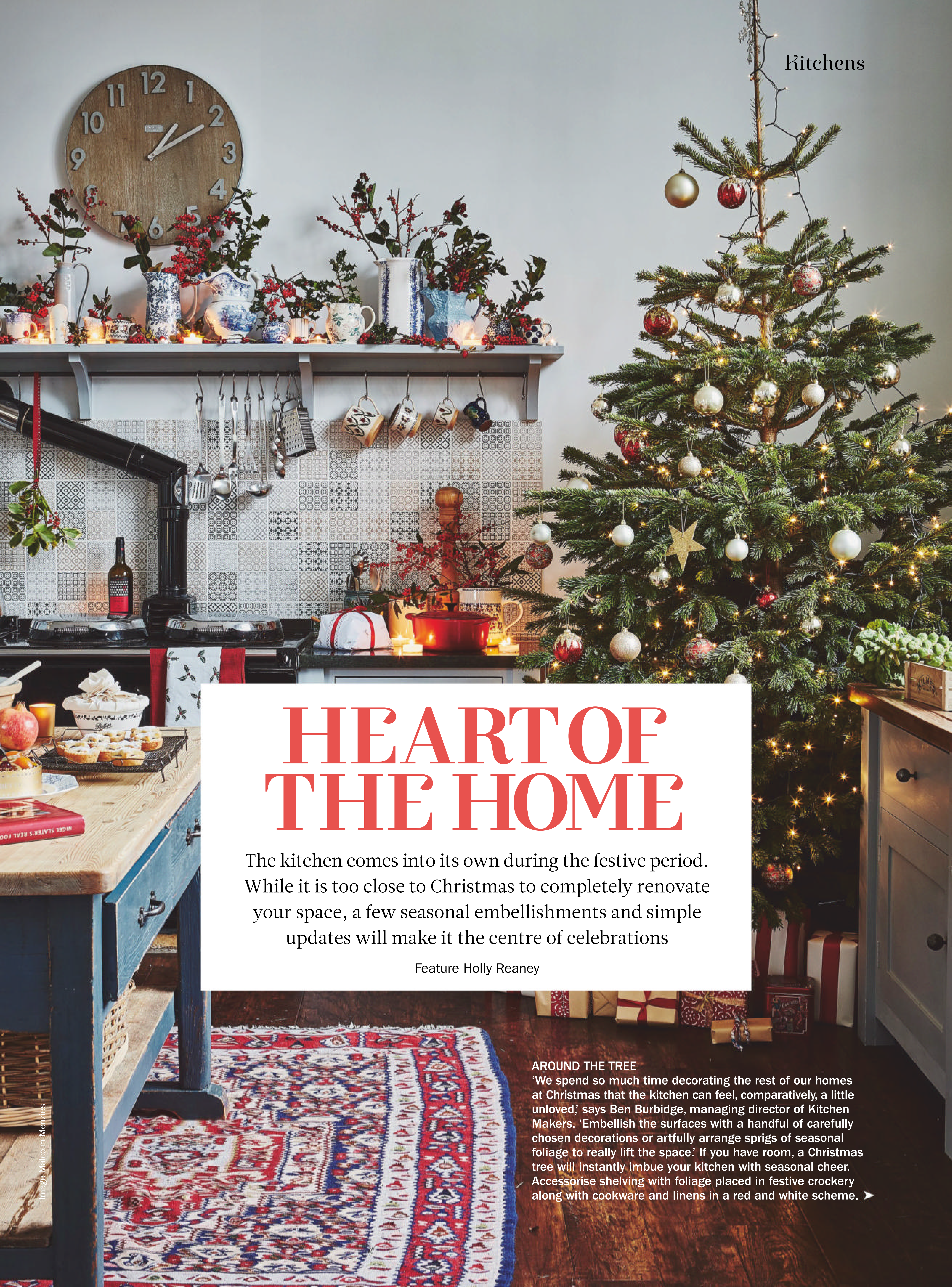


HEART OF THE HOME

The kitchen comes into its own during the festive period. While it is too close to Christmas to completely renovate your space, a few seasonal embellishments and simple updates will make it the centre of celebrations

Feature Holly Reaney

AROUND THE TREE
'We spend so much time decorating the rest of our homes at Christmas that the kitchen can feel, comparatively, a little unloved,' says Ben Burbidge, managing director of Kitchen Makers. 'Embellish the surfaces with a handful of carefully chosen decorations or artfully arrange sprigs of seasonal foliage to really lift the space.' If you have room, a Christmas tree will instantly imbue your kitchen with seasonal cheer. Accessorise shelving with foliage placed in festive crockery along with cookware and linens in a red and white scheme. ➤

Image Malcolm Menzies

Cosy country

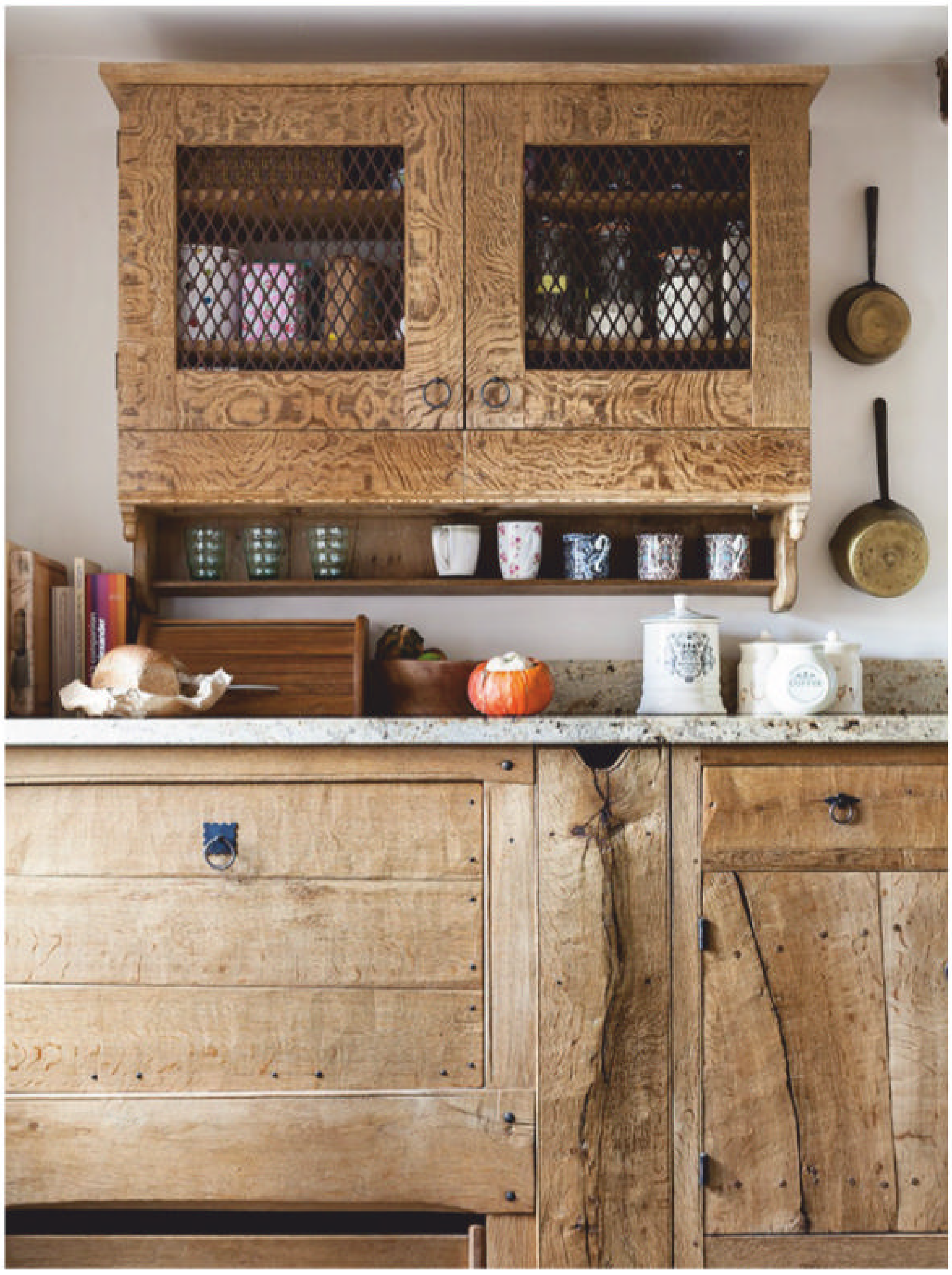
Embrace your home's rustic charm with these inviting ideas

TAKE STOCK
Practical can also be pretty, as this Suffolk dresser, from £1,910 at Neptune, illustrates. Offering plenty of space to store all the glasses and china that you need to host, it is also the perfect place to keep your homemade mince pies, ready to offer to friends who drop by for a catch up. Decorate with a rustic wreath to complete the country look.

DRESSING UP
The finishing touches are key to giving your room a seasonal feel. This hand-block-printed table cloth, £98 from Curated Living, features dahlias and hellebores in red and gold, and is sustainably handmade by artisans in India.

WARM AND COSY
Small but mighty, the Everhot 60 in Burgundy, £5,700, features two ovens, cast-iron simmer plates and a grill. As well as cooking, the electric range also gently warms the kitchen, creating a cosy atmosphere in your home's heart.

COMING CLEAN
All that festive food and drink creates piles of washing up. Even if your dishwasher takes the brunt of the work, a durable and generous sink is still a must. Shaws of Darwen's Bowland butler's sink, £662, features a distinctive fluted front that would instantly be at home in a country-style kitchen.

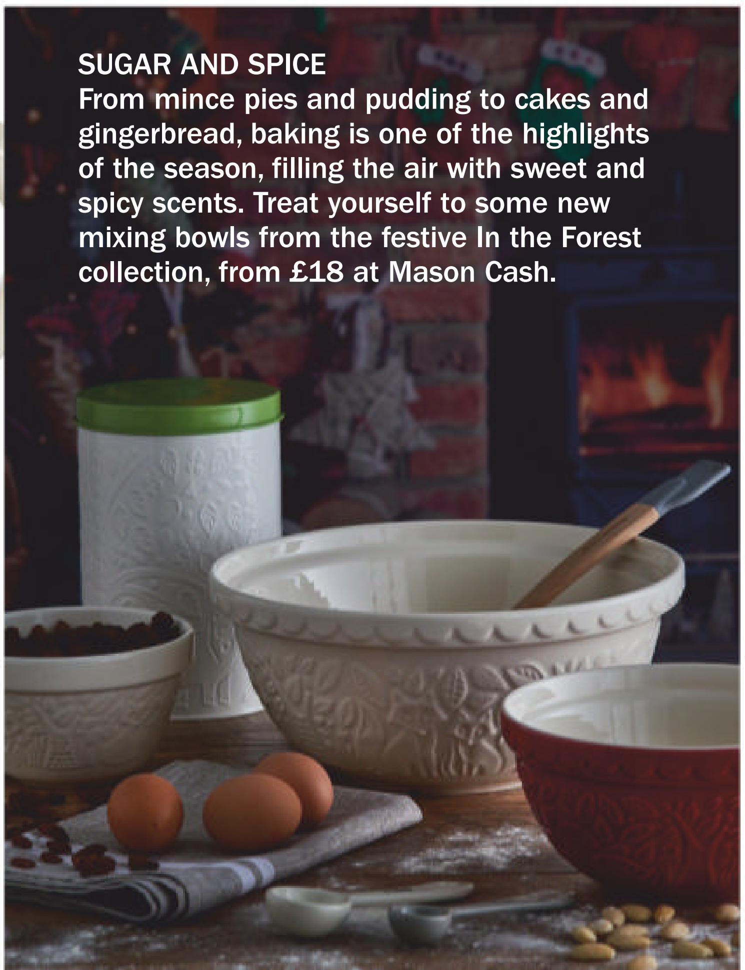


VINTAGE CHARACTER
If you are considering a bigger kitchen update in the new year, then handcrafted wooden cabinetry is a timeless choice. But for maximum character, this design from Jack Badger embraces all the natural splits and knots in the wood, imbuing the space with rustic charm. Priced from £18,600.

COMFY CORNER
The farmhouse table is a mainstay of the country kitchen. A place to bake, prepare, relax, eat and wrap your presents, it is a social hub. This characterful kitchen makes use of a roomy window seat to optimise the space available and create more versatile seating around the table. Piled with plush cushions, it is the ideal spot for the family to enjoy Christmas Day breakfast, basking in the warmth of the Aga.

Image (top) Malcolm Menzies

TIME FOR A BREW
Take a moment to relax and enjoy a mulled wine or hot chocolate in a festive mug. This charming Christmas tree stoneware design is £11 from Sophie Allport.



SUGAR AND SPICE
From mince pies and pudding to cakes and gingerbread, baking is one of the highlights of the season, filling the air with sweet and spicy scents. Treat yourself to some new mixing bowls from the festive In the Forest collection, from £18 at Mason Cash.

ALL THE FRILLS
Keep your festive jumper safe while putting the finishing touches to dinner, with this delightful Betty Red Nordic Christmas apron, £20 at Ragged Rose. ➤

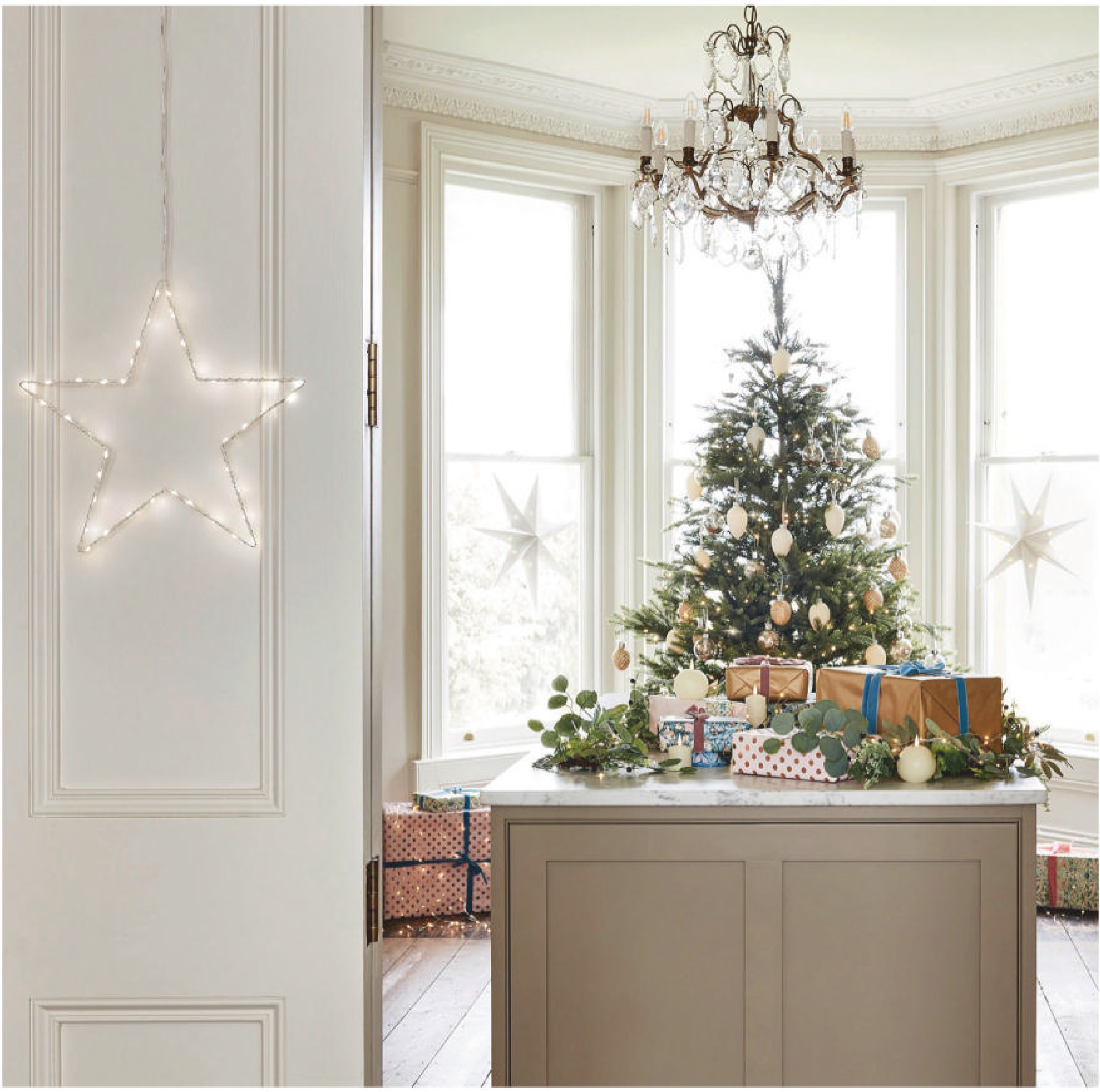
Putting on the glitz

Glitter, metallics and twinkling lights combine to create an on-trend sparkling space

Merry Christmas

MAKE IT MAGICAL
Add a touch of festive cheer by hanging decorations – such as this pale gold metal Merry Christmas sign, £28 from Ella James – from cabinets or on the back of the door.

COCKTAIL HOUR
Take inspiration from the Roaring Twenties and treat guests to an after-dinner tipple from Fairmont Parks' dark matt gold serving cart, £159.99 at Wayfair.



ILLUMINATING IDEA
Lighting is a key consideration for the kitchen all year round, but it becomes all the more prevalent in the darker winter months. Positioning a statement chandelier above an island or table instantly adds elegance to the space – for a similar design, try David Hunt Lighting. Accessorise with festive lighting, such as these string lights, illuminated paper stars and ceramic LED baubles, from £7.99 at Lights4Fun, to give the space a magical air.

TURN UP THE HEAT
While lots of kitchen gadgets can be gimmicky, the right technology can transform your cooking experience. A boiling water tap is one such addition, producing instant 100°C water alongside regular hot and cold, and removing the need for a kettle. Available in this elegant gold finish, Quooker's Fusion round tap costs £2,020.

TAKE A SEAT
Bar stools go hand in hand with a kitchen island, inviting guests to sit down, and transforming the preparation station into a social space. Sweetpea & Willow's Domkapa Eva stool, £870, is inspired by a vintage Portuguese design and features a velvet cushioned seat and intricate woven back set into a solid walnut frame.

Images (right) Malcolm Menzies; (top right) @swoonworthyblog

FANCY FOOTWORK
Mixing materials and shapes is a great way to incorporate depth into your kitchen design. Ca'Pietra's Criss-Cross porcelain tiles, £65 per m^2, replicate the speckled appearance of Venetian terrazzo tiles and combine the look of smooth stone with rough concrete in an eye-catching diamond and star pattern.

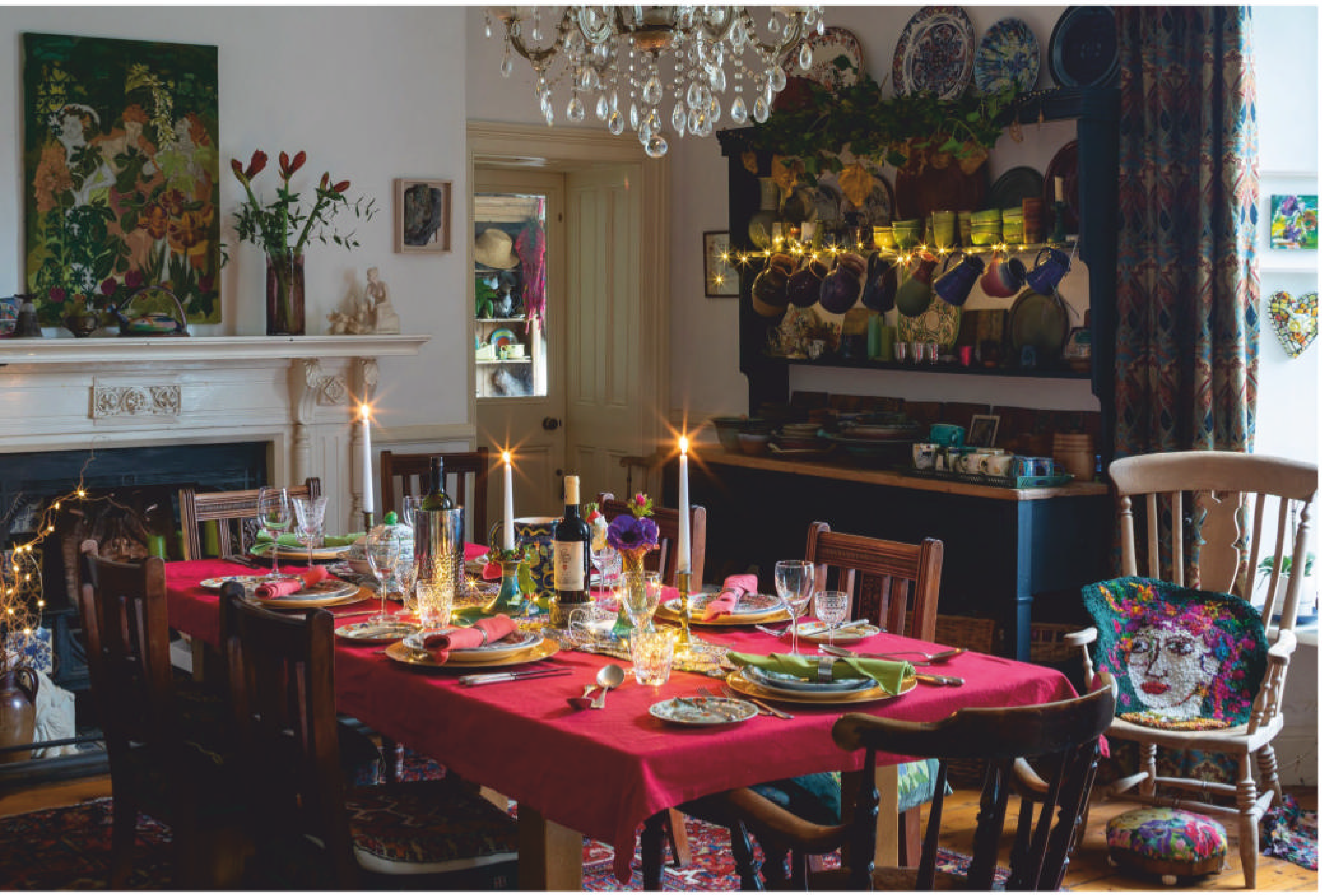
LUXURY FINISH
Minimalist kitchen cabinetry allows for statement materials and accessories to take centre stage. This Shaker design from John Lewis of Hungerford has been dressed up with White Attica quartz worktops and splashbacks. Almost indistinguishable from marble, the material creates a luxury look at a lower cost. Gold brassware and accessories add the finishing touch. Complete kitchens from £25,000.

TICKLED PINK
Make sure you've got enough glasses so that everyone can raise a toast. These handmade pink cocktail glasses, £49.50 for 4 from Audenza, will add a sense of decadence to the occasion. ➤

ALL THAT GLITTERS
Glistening gold is a timeless scheme, particularly in the dining space. Pair opulent gold-rimmed plates with metallic baubles and cut-crystal glassware, and finish each place setting with a luxury cracker.

Timeless townhouse

With classic appeal, traditional kitchens lend themselves to celebrations at Christmas and throughout the year



TO DINE FOR
Decorated with twinkling lights and flickering flames, this cosy dining area is the perfect space for an intimate family gathering. A spacious table from John Lewis & Partners is dressed in a simple red linen tablecloth to let the pretty décor shine, while antique crockery and mismatched glassware give the setting a laid-back feel.

MIDAS TOUCH
Candlelight creates an instant ambience, especially when placed at the heart of the dining table. This sculptural metal candle stand, £39.95 from Monday, has a rustic, aged look and will bring flickering flames to the tablescape.

ON THE RANGE
If you're hosting a large family Christmas, then you need to make sure your oven is up to the job. This Richmond deluxe stove in Kingfisher Teal, from £2,399 at Stoves, features three large ovens – the largest at 64 litres is perfect for the turkey. It also has seven gas burners and a dedicated slow-cook oven so you'll have space for all the trimmings, too.

LEADING LIGHT
An elegant pendant light, such as this Tower three-light cluster design, £102 from Där Lighting, makes a statement over the kitchen island, emphasising it as the centre of the room, while also serving as a task light when cooking.

ISLAND LIVING

Versatile and practical, a kitchen island can reinvent your space. Pair with bar stools to create a sociable kitchen-diner, allowing visitors to join in with the prep, or chat to the host. While it is too late to upgrade your kitchen before Christmas, take time over the festive period to think about what alterations would make things easier. You can then factor these into your design in the new year. Another benefit of planning at this time of year is that the light levels are at their lowest – knowing this will help you to design a space that maximises the natural light that is available all year round.

SITTING PRETTY

Christmas dinner is the main event of the season, so make sure you have got enough seats for all of your guests. Opt for a beautiful design, like this Washakie Linen chair in Pure Navy, £395 from Oka, so that it can sit in whichever room it is needed. PL

TAP INTO TRADITION

Celebrations bring out the best china and largest pots and pans, which aren't always dishwasher friendly. So consider updating your taps to make the clean-up process more efficient. This classically designed chrome Ionian tap, £530 from Devol, comes with a handy spray rinse, to make cleaning heavy pots that bit easier.

PERIOD DRAMA

Darker tones are becoming increasingly popular for kitchen renovations, but the secret of achieving this look is creating balance. Here, dark aubergine cabinets and matching walls create an intimate backdrop, which is softened by white window frames, layered lighting and warm wood furnishings and flooring, to create a welcoming atmosphere perfect for celebrations. Wren's Infinity Plus kitchen is priced from £5,731.

Images (top left) Mark Bolton; (top right) Polly Eltes

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Sweet anticipation

Countdown to Christmas and be transported to the snow-capped Bavarian mountains and twinkling seasonal markets with these traditional German bakes and delectable treats

CHRISTMAS BREAD WITH DRIED FRUIT; SEE NEXT PAGE FOR RECIPE

CHRISTMAS BREAD WITH DRIED FRUIT *Christbrot*

***Christbrot* is best eaten freshly baked without needing time to mature. This is one of the reasons why a *Christbrot* is more popular to bake at home than a Stollen each year. It isn't hard to make this Christmas bread, but the method involves a triple rise, so you'll need to set a morning or afternoon aside if you choose to make it.**

MAKES 1 LOAF
(SERVES ABOUT 6)

- 75g mixed peel
- 50g raisins
- 50g currants
- 1 tbsp dark rum
- 300g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 40g caster sugar
- ½ tsp fine sea salt
- Finely grated zest of ½ a lemon and of ½ an orange
- 50g unsalted butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 18g fresh yeast, or 9g dried
- 70ml tepid whole milk
- 50g flaked almonds

To coat
- 50g unsalted butter, melted
- 40g vanilla sugar or caster sugar
- 40g icing sugar

1. Put the mixed peel, raisins and currants into a bowl, pour over the rum and set aside to infuse while you prepare the dough.
2. Put the flour, sugar, salt and citrus zests into a large bowl and mix together with a wooden spoon, then add the melted butter and egg. Crumble the yeast (or sprinkle, if using dried) into the tepid milk and stir to dissolve. Pour the yeasted milk into the flour mixture and using your hands, bring the ingredients together into a rough dough.
3. Tip the dough onto a floured surface and knead for about 10 minutes until it becomes more elastic. Form it into a ball and nestle it into the bottom of the bowl. Cover the bowl with a teatowel and set aside in a warm spot to rise for 1–3 hours until almost doubled in size. (Alternatively, put the flour, sugar, salt and citrus zests into the bowl of a free-standing electric mixer fitted with a dough hook. Add the butter and egg. Pour in the yeasted milk and knead for 5 minutes until the dough is elastic. Cover the bowl and set aside, as above.)
4. Knock back the dough with your fist and add the almonds and boozy dried fruit (along with any liquid). Knead the fruit and nuts through for a few minutes until evenly incorporated. Form the dough into a ball and return it to the bowl. Cover with the teatowel and set aside in a warm spot for about 20 minutes for a short second rise.
5. Form the dough into a round loaf shape and place it on a baking sheet lined with non-stick baking parchment. Cover with a teatowel and leave somewhere warm to rise for a final 30 minutes.
6. Heat the oven to 190˚C/ 170˚C fan/375˚F/Gas 5. Bake in the oven for 35–40 minutes until brown all over and cooked through, checking after 25 minutes; if it is getting too brown cover it with a piece of foil for the remainder of the baking time.
7. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack and brush with the melted butter repeatedly until all the butter is used up. Sprinkle with the vanilla or caster sugar, then sift over the icing sugar.
8. *Christbrot* is best eaten within a couple of hours of being baked. Or you can wrap it in foil and store in an airtight tin; it will keep for up to 3 days, after which it is still fine to toast for a further 2 days.

JAM-FILLED LEBKUCHEN HEARTS *Gefüllte Lebkuchen*

These little Lebkuchen hearts give way to a soft interior of jam. They are traditionally filled with *Pflaumenmus* (a spiced plum butter) but any sharp, smooth jam – redcurrant, damson or sour cherry jam (sieved) – will all work really well.

MAKES ABOUT 20

- 50g unsalted butter
- 125g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 200g runny honey
- 125g rye flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp ground ginger mixed with 1½ tsp ground cinnamon and ½ tsp ground cloves
- Pinch of fine sea salt
- 25g mixed peel, very finely chopped

FOR THE FILLING
- 80g jam

FOR THE GLAZE
- 6 tbsp icing sugar, sifted
- 1 tbsp just-boiled water
- 1½ tsp lemon juice

1. Melt the butter and honey in a saucepan over a low heat for a few minutes, stirring until the butter has melted and is incorporated into the honey. Allow the mixture to cool.
2. Heat the oven to 180˚C/160˚C fan/350˚F/Gas 4. Put the dry ingredients and mixed peel into a bowl, pour over the honey mixture and stir everything together. When it becomes too difficult to stir, use your hands to bring the mixture together into a dough, then knead for a few minutes until it is smooth.
3. Split the dough in half. Roll out one half on a lightly floured surface to around 3mm thick. Using a heart-shaped cookie cutter, cut out 10 hearts and place them on a large baking sheet (or two small), spaced about 2cm apart. Spoon ½ teaspoon of jam onto the centre of each heart.
4. Now roll out the other half of the dough to the same thickness and cut out 10 more hearts. Roll over them again so that they become slightly larger and thinner (as they need to be domed over the jam). Dip your finger into a bowl of water and run it around the dough edge of the jam-covered hearts. Place the larger hearts on top and seal the edges by pressing round them lightly with your fingertips. Re-roll all the dough offcuts you're left with to make more biscuits.
5. Bake in the centre of the oven for about 12 minutes until slightly golden and firm to the touch, but not browned or hard. While the biscuits are baking, mix all the glaze ingredients together in a bowl to a smooth icing. Transfer the biscuits to a wire rack and, while still warm, brush the tops with the glaze. Allow to cool fully before transferring to an airtight container. They will keep well for a month.

CHRISTMAS FRIED DOUGH

Weihnachts Schmalzgebäck

***Schmalzgebäck* (directly translated as 'lard pastry', so called because the dough was originally fried in lard and/or enriched with lard) is the blanket term for fried dough in Germany and it is not only popular during Christmas and New Year, but also at *Kirchweih*, a celebration organized by the Church, much like a village fête. Unlike doughnuts, these are not pillowy; instead they are crunchy on the outside with a soft interior. They crisp up as they cool, so best not to eat them right out of the pan.**

MAKES ABOUT 20
(SERVES 4–6)

- 1 litre sunflower oil
- 250g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 75g unsalted butter, melted
- 40g caster sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
- Pinch of fine sea salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¾ tsp baking powder
- 1 tbsp white wine, sherry or mead

1. Line a large baking sheet with kitchen paper. Heat the oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan over a high heat to 170˚C/338˚F, or until a cube of bread dropped into it starts fizzing on impact and turns golden after a few seconds. At this point turn the heat down to medium.
2. While the oil is coming up to temperature, put the remaining ingredients into a bowl and mix together with a wooden spoon until it becomes too stiff to mix further, at which point use your hands to bring it together. Knead for a few minutes until a supple but firm dough is formed.
3. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface to a thickness of 3–5mm. Using a pastry cutter or a sharp knife, cut out rectangles of 10x4cm. Make a slit in the centre of the rectangle, stopping just 1cm shy of the short ends. Carefully lift up the piece of dough, take one of the ends and thread it through the slit, twisting it back into position from underneath. Usually this is done with both sides, but this can be too fiddly and so you can leave it with just one twist.
4. Working in batches of 4–5 at a time, gently lower the dough into the hot oil and fry for 1–3 minutes until golden all over, turning once to ensure even cooking. Lift out with a slotted spoon and drain on the lined baking sheet. Once all the dough is fried, sprinkle generously with sugar and serve. ➤

SPICED CHOCOLATE AND PRUNE FUDGE CAKE

Gewürzter Schokoladen Kuchen

This moist, dense cake is made with buckwheat flour, making it gluten free. It is so rich and indulgent it can also double as a dessert.

MAKES 1 (SERVES 8)

- 100g prunes, pitted
- 100ml just boiled water
- 200g unsalted butter, at room temp, plus extra for greasing
- 225g dark brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 100g dark chocolate (70 per cent cocoa solids), melted
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 100g buckwheat flour
- 50g unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cardamom
- 1 tsp baking powder (ensure gluten-free, if necessary)
- 50g cornflour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda

FOR THE FROSTING
- 225g dark chocolate (50 per cent cocoa solids), broken into pieces
- 300ml double cream

TO DECORATE
- Sprig of holly, orange slices or bay leaves

1. Put the prunes into a small bowl and pour the just-boiled water over them. Leave to soak and soften for 30 minutes.

2. Heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/350°F/Gas 4. Grease and line a 23cm springform cake tin. Put the butter, sugar and soaked prunes (including liquid) into a food processor and blitz until smooth. Add the eggs and vanilla extract and blitz until evenly combined – it may look split at this stage, but this is normal. Pour the melted chocolate into the mixture and blitz once more until mixed through. Now add the remaining ingredients and blitz for about 30 seconds until the batter is smooth. Tip the batter into the prepared tin and smooth the top with a spatula.

3. Bake in the centre of the oven for 30 minutes, or until set on top and just starting to brown. A metal skewer inserted into the centre of the cake won't, and should not, come out clean – the middle of this cake is fudgy, hence its name, and because of this it will sink in the centre as it cools. Cool in the tin, turn out onto a wire rack, then turn the correct way up onto a serving plate.

4. To make the frosting, put the chocolate into a large mixing bowl. Heat the cream in a saucepan over a medium-high heat, stirring from time to time, until it just comes to the boil. Take off the heat and pour immediately onto the chocolate. Using a wooden spoon, beat the chocolate and cream together until smooth and glossy; the heat from the cream will melt the chocolate.

5. Spoon the frosting generously into the dip in the centre of the cake. Decorate with a sprig of holly, some dried orange slices, bay leaves – whatever takes your fancy really. Alternatively, if you choose not to frost this, it is good eaten warm (but not hot straight out of the oven) for dessert with a dollop of crème fraîche on the side. Unfrosted, it will keep well in an airtight tin for 3 days.

PEPPERMINT FONDANTS

Pfefferminz Taler

These are as German as they are British. Fondant actually plays as prominent a role during Easter celebrations in Germany as it does at Christmas time. Peppermint is the main Christmas flavouring and small bite-sized pieces are often dipped in chocolate, while fruit-flavoured fondant is made into wreath shapes.

MAKES ABOUT 35

- 300g icing sugar, sifted
- 1 egg white
- ½ tsp peppermint extract

1. Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl until a thick fondant is formed. Take teaspoon-sized pieces of fondant and roll them into balls between the palms of your hands. Place on a baking sheet lined with non-stick baking parchment and press down gently on the fondant balls with the prongs of a fork until flattened into button shapes, around 7mm thick.

2. Leave to air dry for 24 hours before boxing up, turning the fondants over after 12 hours to ensure that they dry out equally on both sides. ➤

POPPY SEED SNAILS
Mohnschnecken

Poppy seeds have a particular nutty depth of flavour to them. They are used in baking year round in many Northern European countries, but it is during Advent and Christmas that they really come into their own, as they are an integral ingredient to many enriched yeast dough bakes, such as these delicious little blazed buns.

MAKES 10 SMALL SNAILS

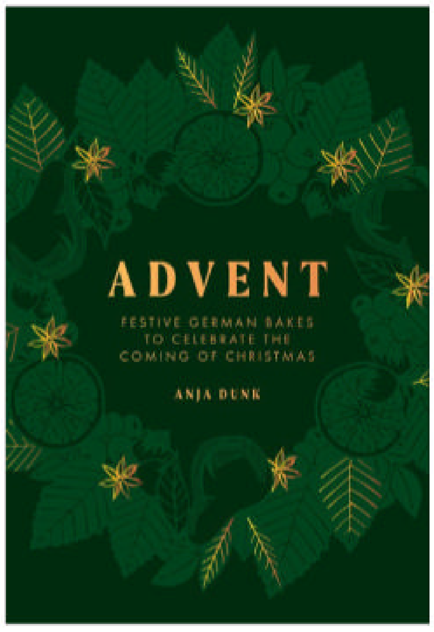
- 300g strong white bread flour, plus extra for dusting
- 20g caster sugar
- ½ tsp fine sea salt
- 50g unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 15g fresh yeast, or alternatively 7g dried yeast
- 170ml tepid milk

FOR THE FILLING
- 80g poppy seeds, ground (you can use a coffee grinder)
- 80g raisins
- 50g dark brown sugar
- 85ml hot milk

FOR THE TOP
- Milk, for brushing
- Poppy seeds, for sprinkling

FOR THE GLAZE
- 80g icing sugar, sifted
- 4 tsp water

1. To make the filling, put the poppy seeds, raisins and sugar into a bowl and pour over the hot milk. Set aside until cool, then stir.
2. Mix the flour, sugar and salt in a large bowl. Using your fingertips, work the butter into the flour until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Crumble the yeast (or sprinkle if using dried) into the tepid milk and stir to dissolve. Pour the yeasted milk into the flour mixture and, using your hands, bring everything together into a rough dough. Tip out onto a floured surface and knead for 5 minutes until elastic.
3. Form the dough into a ball and nestle it into the bowl. Cover the bowl with a teatowel and set aside in a warm spot to rise for 1 hour, or until doubled in size. (Alternatively, mix the flour, sugar and salt in the bowl of a free-standing electric mixer fitted with a dough hook, then add the butter and yeasted milk. Knead for 5 minutes until elastic. Cover the bowl and set aside, as above.)
4. Line a medium baking sheet with non-stick baking parchment. Knock the dough back, then roll it out on a floured surface into a rectangle 30cm long by 20cm wide. Spread the poppy seed filling over the dough, leaving a 1cm border. Dip your finger in water and run it around the edges. With the long side closest to you, roll the dough up into a log. Cut the dough into 10 rounds, about 3cm thick. Place each round 3cm apart on the prepared baking sheet.
5. If baking now, heat the oven to 180˚C/160˚C fan/350˚F/Gas 4. Let the snails rest until risen to half their size again – this should take 30 minutes. If baking the next day, place the sheet, covered, in the fridge to rest overnight, making sure you take them out of the fridge 30 minutes before baking.
6. Brush the snails with milk, sprinkle with poppy seeds, and bake for about 15 minutes until golden.
7. While they are baking, make the glaze by mixing the icing sugar and water together until smooth. Transfer the baked snails to a wire rack and spoon the glaze over the top of them while they are still warm.



This is an edited extract from *Advent: Festive German Bakes to Celebrate the Coming of Christmas* by Anja Dunk (Quadrille, £25)

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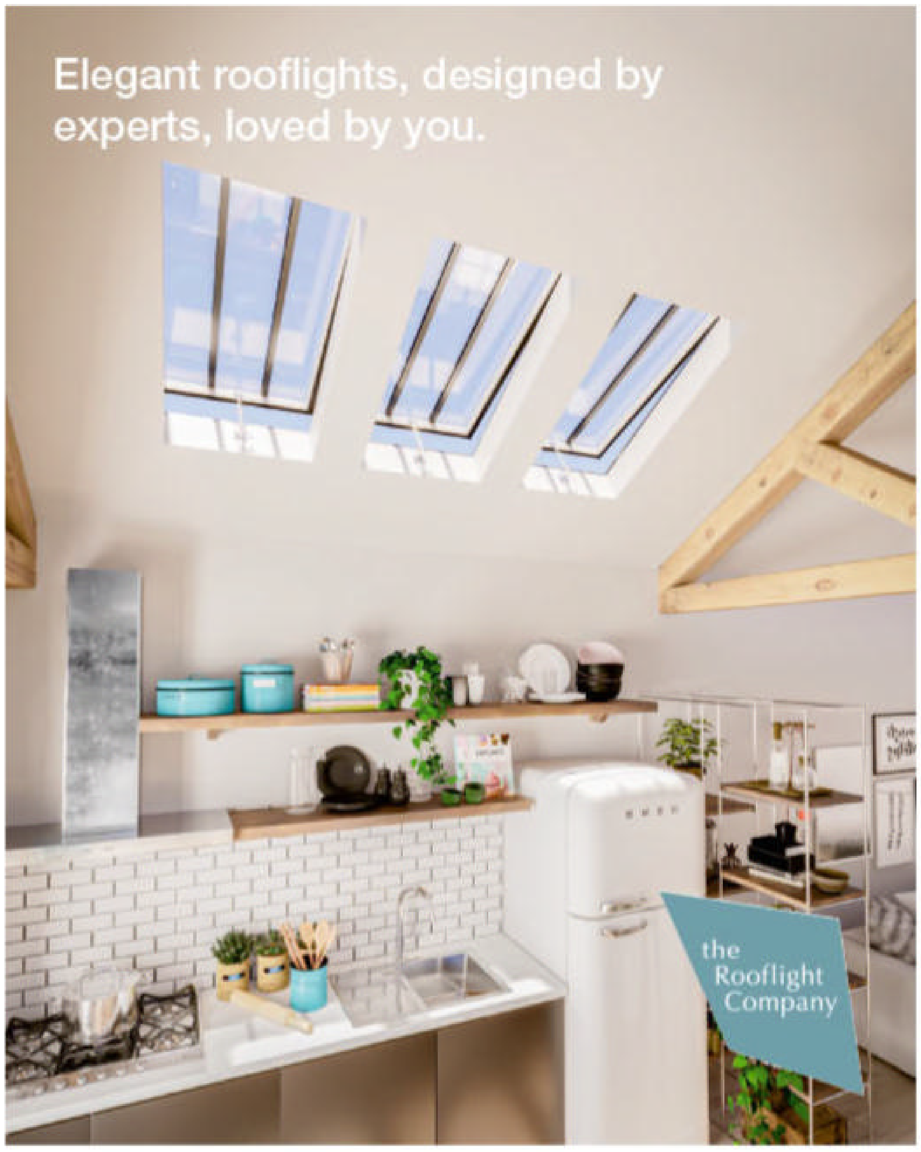

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Sugar, spice and all things nice

From her garden kitchen studio in the idyllic Dorset village of Cranborne, Alix Fauvel bakes delicious Christmas cakes and gingerbread biscuits for the festive season

Words Rachel Crow and Sharon Parsons | Photographs Richard Gadsby

Above: A tasty gingerbread wreath is decorated with Alix's hand-iced festive biscuits. 'The gingerbread has really grown in popularity over the last year,' Alix explains
Opposite: She often uses the welcoming family kitchen of her country house in the village of Cranborne, to decorate the cakes and biscuits. 'At this time of year it's Christmas cake central in our house'

ALIX FAUVEL
CAKESMITH
OXO
AGA

'From September onwards I smell of Christmas; I have a faint air of cinnamon and ginger about me all of the time,' Alix Fauvel quips as she prepares yet another baking tray of gingerbread stars, trees and reindeer for the oven, among the many hundreds she will make in the run up to Christmas.

Her work kitchen is housed in a shiplap cladded garden outbuilding, a converted piggery nestled behind her elegant Victorian home on the edge of the tranquil village of Cranborne. With its views out over the fields of the neighbouring farm, 'it's not bad as a commute,' smiles Alix, although on chilly days she will often decamp back to the warmth of the cosy family kitchen to decorate her iced cakes and biscuits with her skilled artist's touch.

'I make the Christmas cakes far in advance from July, as they need time to perfectly mature, but the gingerbreads I make as I go along and nearer to Christmas, so it's a nice mix. I love getting lost in painting and decorating them and find it so relaxing,' Alix explains.

This is her busiest time of year, often working 16-hour days to satisfy the orders that keep rolling in for her bespoke and individually handpainted cakes and biscuits. 'Everything is handmade and decorated so it is very labour intensive. I use a mixture of painted decoration and royal icing to create various textures and a three-dimensional feel. No two are quite the same,' Alix explains.

Getting the cake orders out is often a family affair, with daughters Elise, 20, Margaux, 18, and Cecilia, 16, getting involved as chief packers. 'My three girls are fantastic: they often form a production line, helping me to box up the cakes, write labels and tie ribbons,' Alix beams.

Like many others who have had to adapt and change their business model over the past two years, the lockdowns did spell a dramatic change for Alix's seasonal business. 'I was suddenly faced with nothing in lockdown, as all events and festive family gatherings and birthday celebrations were cancelled. I had been supplying Christmas cakes wholesale to Daylesford and Selfridges, but I just got by offering click-and-collect for smaller bakes. Then last year I saw a four-fold increase in online sales of Christmas cakes,' she says.

Alix also launched gingerbread biscuit kits, which she supplies baked, iced and with all the components for the customers to construct and decorate with edible ink pens and embellishments. 'Moving to online sales meant the three-dimensional structures, such as gingerbread houses or reindeer and sleigh sets, did not survive in the post, so making them as kits offered a perfect solution,' she explains.

Before setting up Alix Fauvel Cakesmith in 2014, Alix worked in the food industry for more than 20 years. Her roles included developing sandwiches and ready meals for Marks & Spencer, to working for several olive companies – 'which was nice as I got to travel around the Mediterranean and North Africa to meet suppliers.'

The family moved to Cranborne when her husband, Gavin, became estate manager of the Cranborne Estate in 2003, and gradually, after working freelance alongside baking for friends and family for years, Alix launched her cake business.

'It started from making my girls' birthday cakes, as people then asked me if I could make cakes for their children's birthdays, too, and it grew from there. Eventually, I got so busy, I decided I needed to either stop altogether or make a proper go of it – I went for the latter and the business was born.'

At first, Alix decorated her cakes with iced motifs and models, 'but one day someone asked ➤

Clockwise from top far left: Alix forages for natural greenery to decorate her festive home; her elegant house in Cranborne, 'a beautiful place to live, sitting in a lovely valley, with a very close-knit, supportive community,' she explains; all things nice combine to create an indulgent Christmas cake mixture – vine fruits, dates, prunes, figs, apricots and cranberries are bathed in sherry to become drunkenly plump, then the cake mix is prepared before baking slowly and gently and, once baked, the cakes are regularly fed with generous helpings of her secret recipe brandy liqueur over the next few months as they mature to perfection ready for Christmas; gingerbread trees, reindeer and a chalet create a too-good-to-eat tableau; beautiful festive gingerbread biscuits are strung so they can be hung on a tree – gingerbreads are priced from £3; stars are cut out for one of Alix's finely detailed creations; she uses fine brushes and food colourings to decorate each cake individually by hand

ALIX FAUVEL
CAKESMITH
@alixcakesmith
ALIX FAUVEL
CAKESMITH
handmade

Left: Alix outside her garden kitchen. All cakes are boxed and tied with ribbon, adding a special flourish to the presentation. She had the idea for her cake-inspired logo, then commissioned a design studio to bring it to life
Below: Her beautiful hand-decorated cakes are priced from £25. 'My mum's family are all very artistic and I'm sure that's where I get my creativity from. I seem to find ideas for decorative finishes everywhere,' she says

ALIX FAUVEL
CAKESMITH

me to do pheasants and I realised I couldn't capture the birds' intricate colouring unless I painted them – that's when I began to work with fine brushes in a more delicate, detailed way. I've always enjoyed painting and art as well, and it was a way to marry the two different interests together.'

For the first two years she baked everything from her home kitchen, but as her equipment and paraphernalia started to take over the house, 'with every surface loaded with bowls of fruit soaking, cakes cooling, and cake boxes and bags of ingredients piled up everywhere,' she realised she would have to find another space. The solution 'was right under my nose,' she says – in the form of the little outbuilding at the end of the garden. 'A local caterer was selling her business and I was able to buy the industrial oven, prep tables and mixers from her. Having a dedicated workspace made a big difference: everything felt more professional and I could separate work and family life.'

The business has evolved as Alix's reputation as a cake maker has grown. Along with private commissions, she supplies Christmas cakes to a small range of independent shops. More recently, for a few days a week she has also been running a cafe at florists Pod & Pip in the Wiltshire countryside, overlooking its cutting garden.

While Alix sells many of her Christmas bakes online, she still enjoys a busy local trade from customers in the Dorset and Wiltshire areas, who come to collect their sweet treats from her garden kitchen. 'On Christmas Eve, it's very jolly. By this time, I've baked the last of the gingerbread, the ovens are off, and customers come to pick up their cakes and biscuits,' Alix explains.

'Then everyone from the village gathers to sing carols accompanied by roasted chestnuts and mulled wine. It's at that point our family Christmas can really begin. We go for walks, snooze in front of the fire and enjoy nice food – although I don't always fancy cake, funnily enough!' PL

For more details about Alix's cakes and biscuits visit alixfauvel.co.uk or call 07795 482907

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Garden Journal

Add some seasonal points of interest to your winter garden and then dream about beautiful displays next spring

PERENNIAL POTS
Plant up some recycled metal buckets with flowering or berried evergreens, such as *Skimmia japonica*, viburnum or *Camellia japonica,* to provide focal points of interest in your winter garden. With varying designs, some buckets are part painted, and others feature utility graphics. £18.50, RE.

FLOWERY PROSE
Rather than sending your garden-loving friends and family seasonal greetings on a card this year, why not opt for a horticultural-themed poetry pamphlet, sharing with them the work of contemporary and historical bards? Introduced by Monty Don, *Ten Poems About Gardens* comes complete with a bookmark for penning your message of comfort and joy. £4.95 from Winter's Moon.

Ten Poems about Gardens
Introduced by Monty Don

ON THE BOOKSHELF

While you hibernate indoors this winter, curl up with *The Flower Hunter* by artist, landscape designer and photographer Lucy Hunter (£30, Ryland Peters & Small). In it, Lucy shows how her garden, set in the mountains of north Wales, has provided the natural materials for beautiful creative projects, such as magical fresh and dried floral arrangements, homemade natural dyes, or pressed flower journals, all captured in her evocative photography. Be inspired to see your own garden for its creative potential.

the FLOWER HUNTER
Seasonal flowers, inspired by nature and gathered from the garden
LUCY HUNTER

FOLLOW THE STAR

Hanging from a tree or entrance, this string of star lights will add special festive sparkle to your outdoor area, welcoming guests to joyful gatherings. Battery operated, it includes a six- and 18-hour timer, £17.50, Nordic House.

Feature Rachel Crow Images (*The Flower Hunter*) Lucy Hunter © Ryland Peters & Small

ROSES FOR WINTER

Few flowers dare show their faces in the colder months, but hellebores defy the odds, pushing through frozen ground to light up the gloom with luminous, colourful blooms

As the days shorten and Arctic winds blow in from the north, the garden falls into its annual slumber and the long wait for spring begins. But just as memories of summer have faded, fresh green shoots appear in hellebores, followed by exquisite flowers in jewel-like colours ranging from glittering whites and yellows, pastel pinks, to deep purples and reds.

Hellebores are used to create a continuous flower display from December to May, providing a welcome source of colour and interest through winter.

Plant breeder and owner of Ashwood Nurseries in Kinver, John Massey, recommends the sparkling white *Helleborus niger* Ashwood Strain and one of the many *H.* x *hybridus* Ashwood Garden Hybrids for flowers before Christmas, with 'Penny's Pink', sporting marbled pink-flushed foliage, following on in February.

Award-winning garden designer Rosemary Coldstream advises planting lenten roses – *Helleborus* x *hybridus* – in a raised bed so that you can see their nodding flowers more clearly, while for pots, she suggests *H.* x *ericsmithii* 'Ruby Glow' with its pink, upward-facing flowers. 'In borders I prefer the more naturalistic form of *H.* x *sternii*, its pretty, veined leaves contrasting with pinky-green flowers,' she adds.

'Harvington Single Smokey' is the favourite choice for borders for Penny Dawson of Twelve Nunns nursery in Lincolnshire. 'Its subtle purple-blue colour is striking when teamed with white, lime or yellow flowers,' she says.

Hellebores are ideal for semi-shade, or plant the spiny-leaved corsican hellebore *(H. argutifolius)* in sunnier sites. John Massey recommends a moist, well-drained soil with added leafy compost, especially for *H. niger*, while Penny Dawson advises that feeding plants with seaweed fertiliser in autumn, February and April, when they are developing new leaves, will deliver the best results.

Where to buy hellebores

ASHWOOD NURSERIES, Kinver, Kingswinford DY6 0AE. Tel: 01384 401996; ashwoodnurseries.com

TWELVE NUNNS, Stamford, Lincolnshire PE9 2GF. Tel: 01778 590455; twelvenunns.co.uk

HAZLES CROSS FARM NURSERY, Kingsley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST10 2EP. Tel: 01538 752669; hazlescrossfarmnursery.co.uk

Top: The light pink flowers of *Helleborus* 'Penny's Pink', which darken as they mature, bloom above marbled, dark foliage from February to May
Above right: The dainty yellow flowers of 'Harvington Single Yellow Speckled' look stunning in a border with early spring bulbs
Above left: The upward-facing flowers of *H.* x *ericsmithii* 'Ruby Glow' are perfect for containers
Left: The white flowers of this form of *H.* x *hydridus* Ballard's Group may appear before Christmas in sheltered gardens

Feature Zia Allaway Images (*H.* x *hybridus* Ballard's Group, 'Ruby Glow', 'Harvington Single Yellow Speckled') Annaick Guitteny; (*H.* 'Penny's Pink') Zia Allaway

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FESTIVE FLORALS

Ring in the Christmas season with wreaths created from flowers and foliage foraged from your garden or hedgerows, by following these three simple projects

Photographs GAP Photos/Modeste Herwig | Words and styling Marieke Nolsen

HIPPEASTRUM WREATH

YOU WILL NEED:

- Oasis wreath
- Skewers
- Staples
- Binding wire
- 15 elongated pine cones
- Sphagnum moss
- 7 stems of dried *Hydrangea macrophylla* (mophead and lacecap) flowers
- 7 stems of dried *Hydrangea paniculata* flowers
- 7 pine sprigs
- 7 branches of ivy with berries
- 7 branches with ornamental apples – we used *Malus* x *robusta* 'Red Sentinel'
- 5 branches with rose hips
- 5 branches of buddleja
- 10 birch twigs
- 10 stems of different colours of *Hippeastrum* (amaryllis) – we used 'Naranja', 'Hercules' and 'Nagano'

METHOD:

1. First make sure that the oasis wreath is completely saturated with water.

2. Cover the sides of the oasis wreath with moss and secure in place by staples or wire.

3. Insert a stick diagonally in the oasis to create holes where you can insert the hippeastrum.

4. Insert a thick skewer into each stem of the hippeastrum, making sure it is slightly longer than the stem, then insert and secure it in the oasis wreath using the holes created.

5. Cover the oasis completely with the hydrangea flowers, ivy and pine sprigs

6. Wind wire around the pine cones and secure to the wreath. Then insert the rose hips, ornamental apples and the flowers of the buddleja loosely through these, nicely distributed and protruding out a little more from the wreath.

7. Finally, insert the birch twigs with the thickest side into the oasis. Secure the end in the oasis with a staple, or tie it to another branch with a winding wire. ➤

CHRISTMAS BELLS WREATH

YOU WILL NEED:

- 2 zinc bells on thick rope
- Winding wire
- Long flexible branches, such as birch
- 2 small blocks of wet oasis
- Sphagnum moss
- 5 pieces of silver moss
- 12 elongated pine cones
- 5 round pine cones
- 3 mountain tea plants (*gaultheria*)
- 7 branches of ivy with berries
- 7 branches with ornamental apples – we used *Malus* x *robusta* 'Red Sentinel'
- 7 branches with small rose hips
- Asparagus fern
- 5 pine sprigs

METHOD:

1. Cover a block of wet oasis with sphagnum moss, secured in place with winding wire.

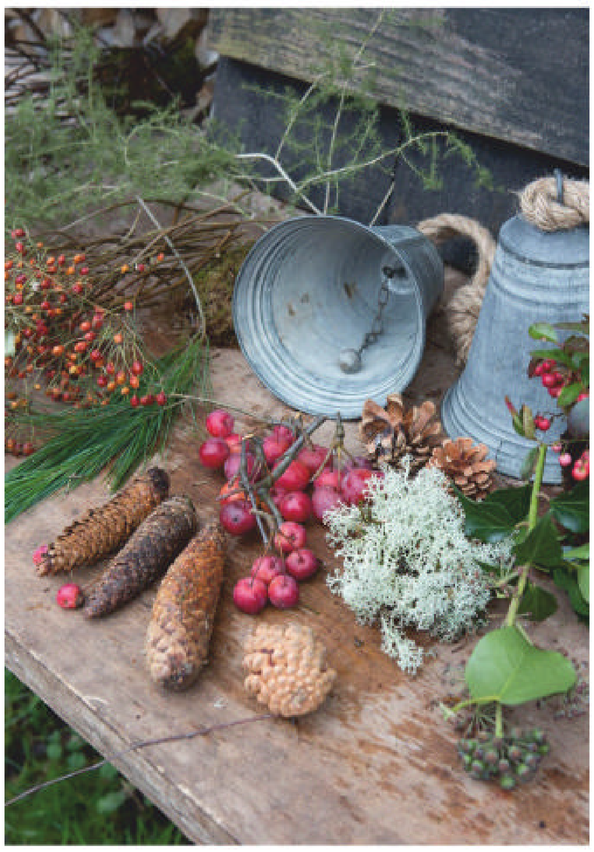
2. Attach about 7 long, flexible branches to the oasis block. Secure the ends of the branches about halfway up the block, leaving lengths of wire either side.

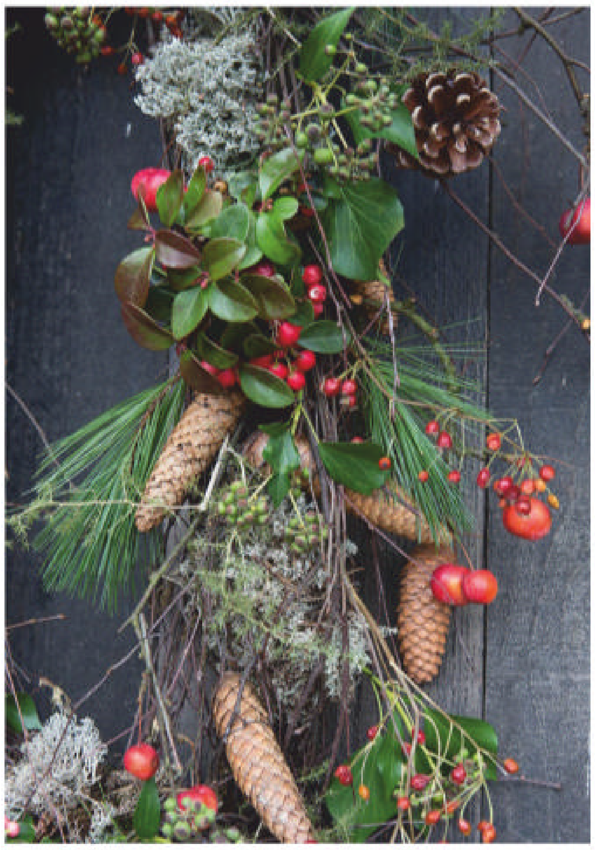
3. Pull the lengths of wire through the loop which attaches the clapper to the bell. This will fasten the oasis and branches into the bell. Use the wire to secure.

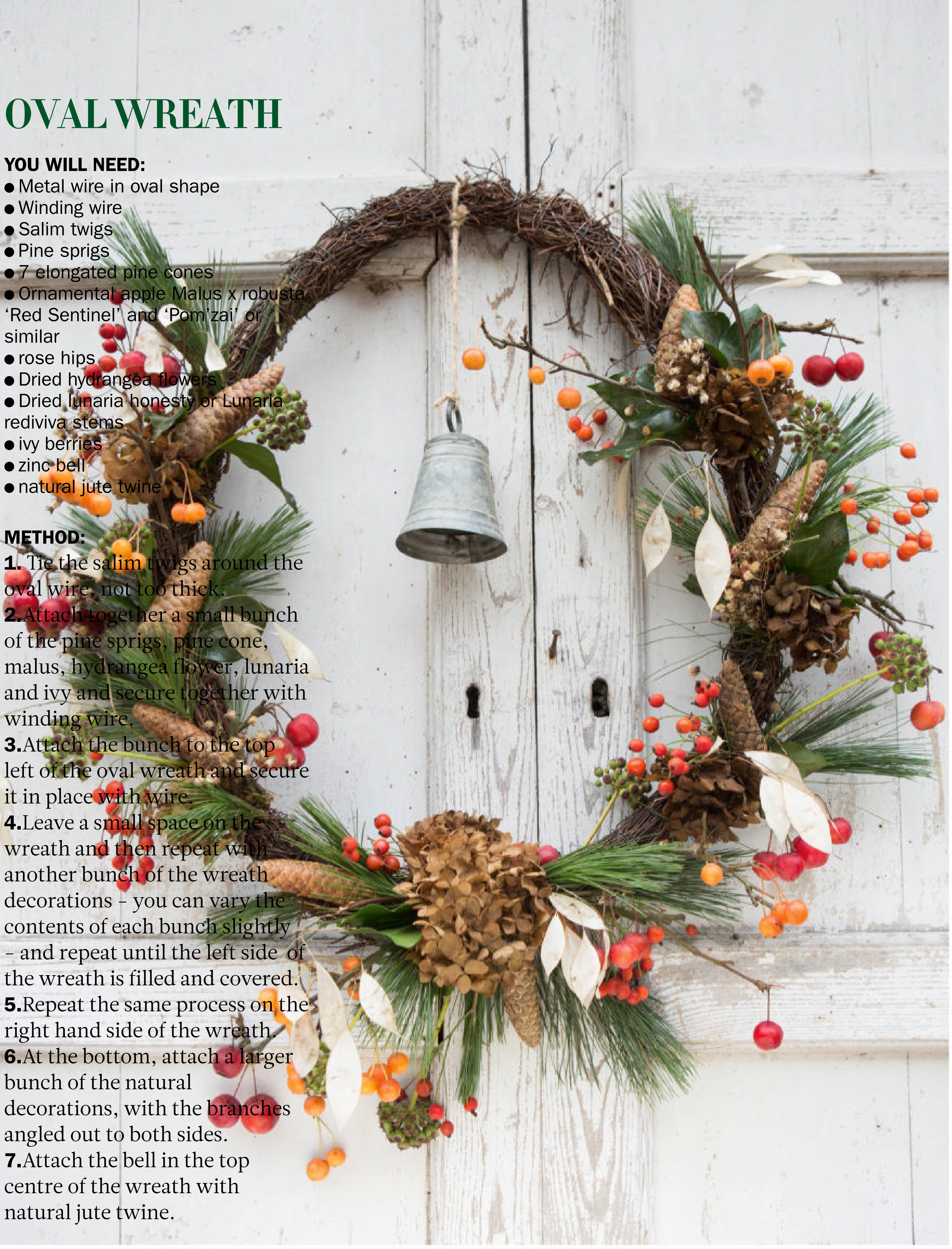
4. Repeat this with the second bell and connect the bells together at the top. Then use winding wire to tie the two sets of branches protruding from each bell at the bottom to create an oval shape.

5. Cover the root balls of the mountain tea plants with sphagnum moss, secured in place with winding wire, then space the plants around the oval of flexible branches, and secure in place with wire.

6. Between the three plants, attach the silver moss, pine cones and other materials, building up the display so that the branches are covered. ➤







OVAL WREATH

YOU WILL NEED:

- Metal wire in oval shape
- Winding wire
- Salim twigs
- Pine sprigs
- 7 elongated pine cones
- Ornamental apple Malus x robusta 'Red Sentinel' and 'Pom'zai' or similar
- rose hips
- Dried hydrangea flowers
- Dried lunaria honesty or Lunaria rediviva stems
- ivy berries
- zinc bell
- natural jute twine

METHOD:

1. Tie the salim twigs around the oval wire, not too thick.
2.Attach together a small bunch of the pine sprigs, pine cone, malus, hydrangea flower, lunaria and ivy and secure together with winding wire.
3.Attach the bunch to the top left of the oval wreath and secure it in place with wire.
4.Leave a small space on the wreath and then repeat with another bunch of the wreath decorations – you can vary the contents of each bunch slightly – and repeat until the left side of the wreath is filled and covered.
5.Repeat the same process on the right hand side of the wreath.
6.At the bottom, attach a larger bunch of the natural decorations, with the branches angled out to both sides.
7.Attach the bell in the top centre of the wreath with natural jute twine.

OVAL WREATH

YOU WILL NEED:

- Metal wire in oval shape
- Winding wire
- Salim twigs
- Zinc bell
- Natural jute twine
- 16 pine sprigs
- 8 elongated pine cones
- 7 branches with ornamental apples – we used *Malus* x *robusta* 'Red Sentinel' and 'Pom'zai'
- 7 branches with small rose hips
- 5 dried hydrangea flowers
- 7 stems of dried lunaria (honesty) or *Lunaria rediviva* stems
- 7 branches of ivy with berries

METHOD:

1. Tie the salim twigs around the oval wire, not too thick.
2. Create a small bunch of the pine sprigs, pine cones, malus, hydrangea flower, lunaria and ivy and secure them together with winding wire.
3. Attach the bunch to the top left of the oval wreath and secure it in place with wire.
4. Leave a small space on the wreath and then repeat with another bunch of the wreath decorations – you can vary the contents of each bunch slightly – and repeat until the left side of the wreath is filled and covered.
5. Repeat the same process on the right side of the wreath.
6. At the bottom, attach a larger bunch of the natural decorations, with the branches angled out to both sides.
7. Attach the bell in the top centre of the wreath with natural jute twine.

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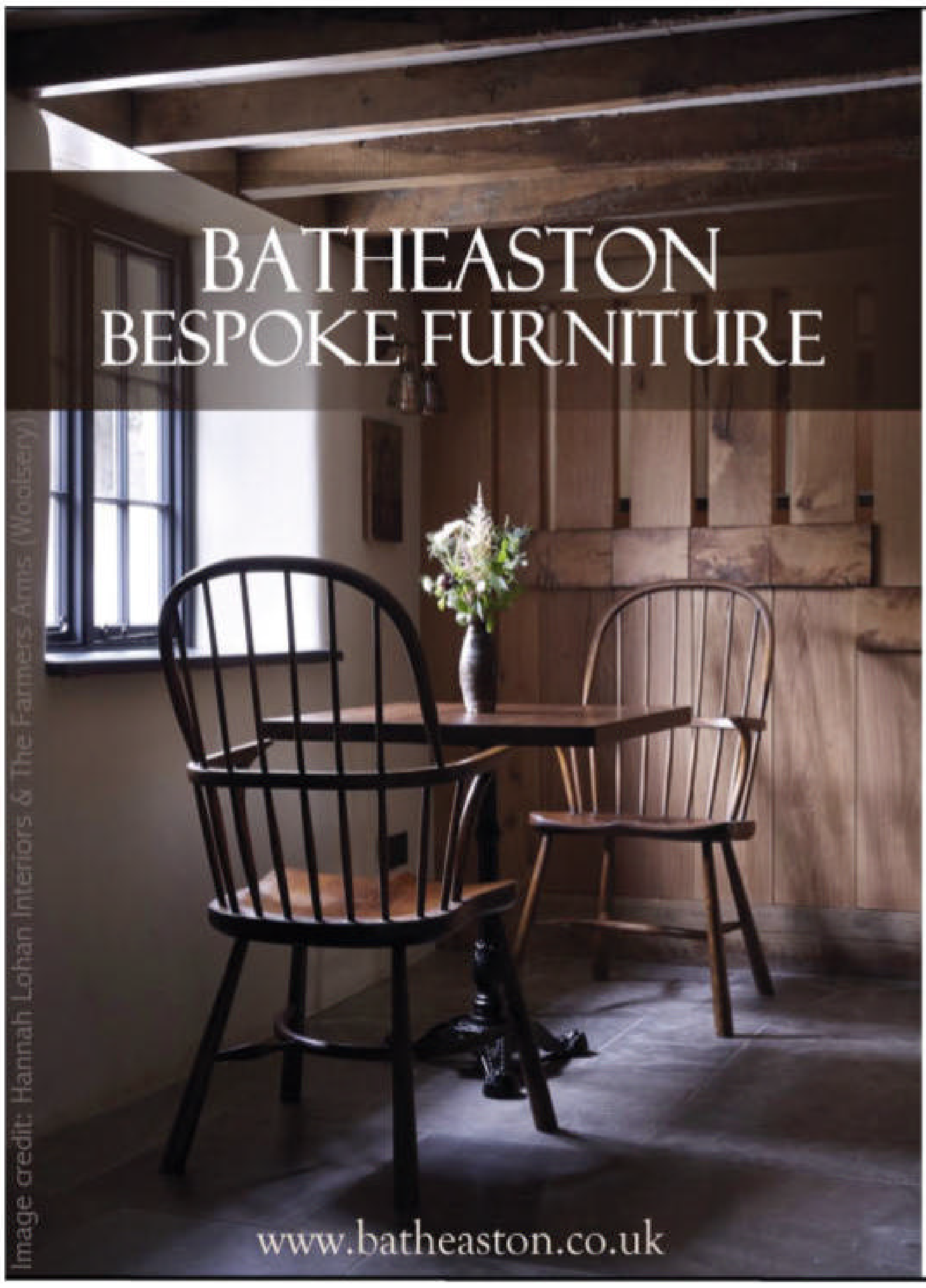

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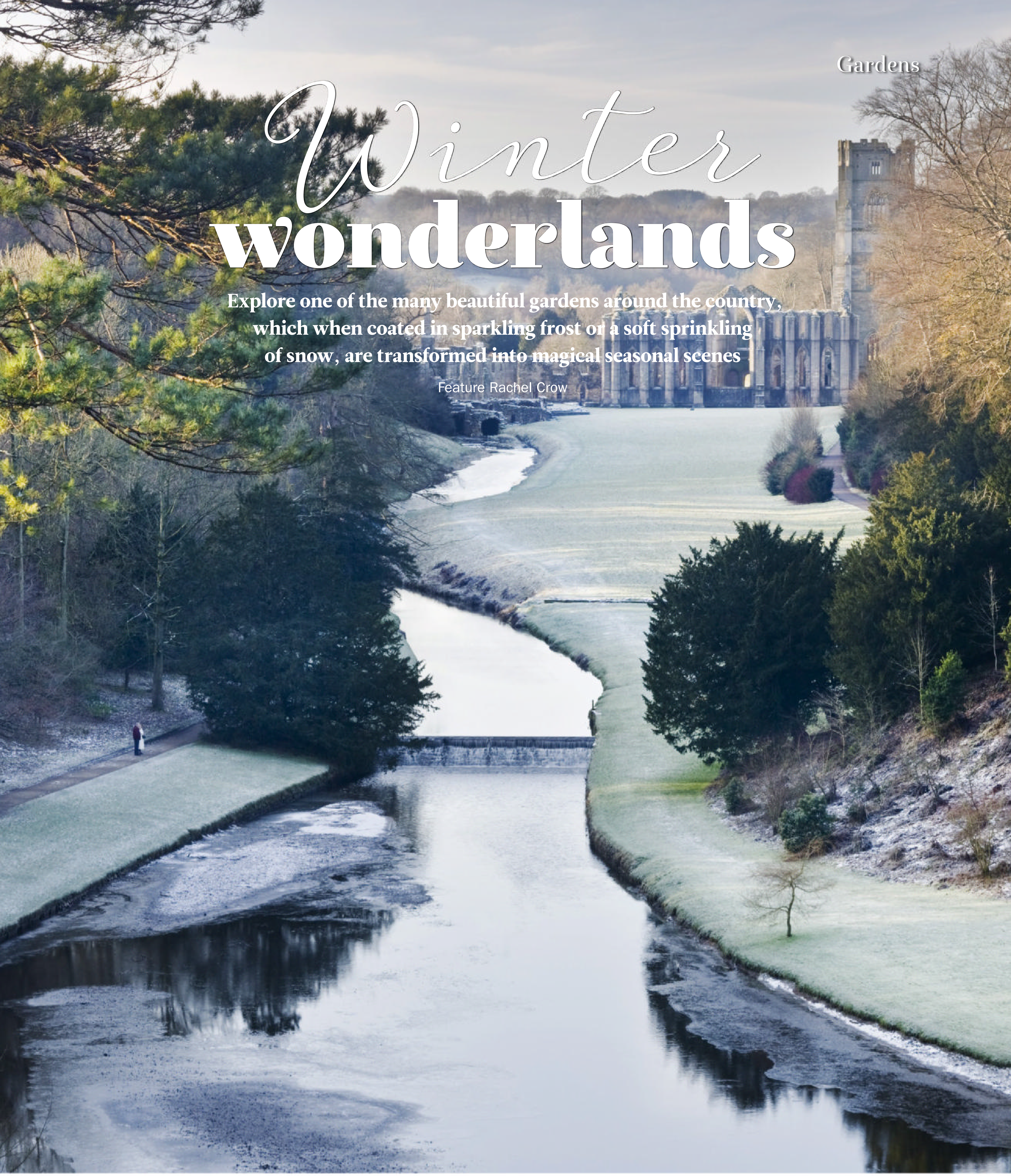


Image ©National Trust Images/Andrew Butler

Studley Royal Water Garden, Ripon, North Yorkshire

The stunning 18th-century creation of John Aislabie and his son William, Studley Royal Water Garden surrounds the romantic ruins of the 12th-century Fountains Abbey. In winter, the skeletal structure of ancient trees are reflected in the still, icy waters of the ornamental lakes and ponds, while red, fallow and sika deer can be glimpsed wandering among the statues and follies of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Open daily except Fridays, 10am-4pm. Tel: 01765 608888; nationaltrust.org.uk ➤

Anglesey Abbey, Cambridge

Impressing and surprising visitors around every corner was Lord Fairhaven's intention when he created the garden around his Jacobean-style home in the 1920s, and it does so still in abundance. The dazzling Winter Walk has appeal for all the senses, from the scents of honeysuckle, viburnum and sarcococca; the sight of fiery scarlet willow and red-barked dogwood; to the feel of tactile bark in the grove of Himalayan silver birch. Open daily, 9.30am-4pm. Tel: 01223 810080; nationaltrust.org.uk

Aberglasney, Carmarthenshire, Wales

With an Elizabethan cloister garden at its heart (pictured), the 10 acres at Aberglasney were brought back from the brink of ruin and spectacularly restored. A plantsman's paradise, there is much to admire over the winter months, including drifts of witch hazels and hellebores bursting into bloom, and the early-flowering *Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris', which makes a special appearance in time for Christmas. Open daily, 10.30am-4pm. Tel: 01558 668998; aberglasney.org

Images (Anglesey) © National Trust Images/ MMGI/Marianne Majerus; (Aberglasney) Nigel McCall

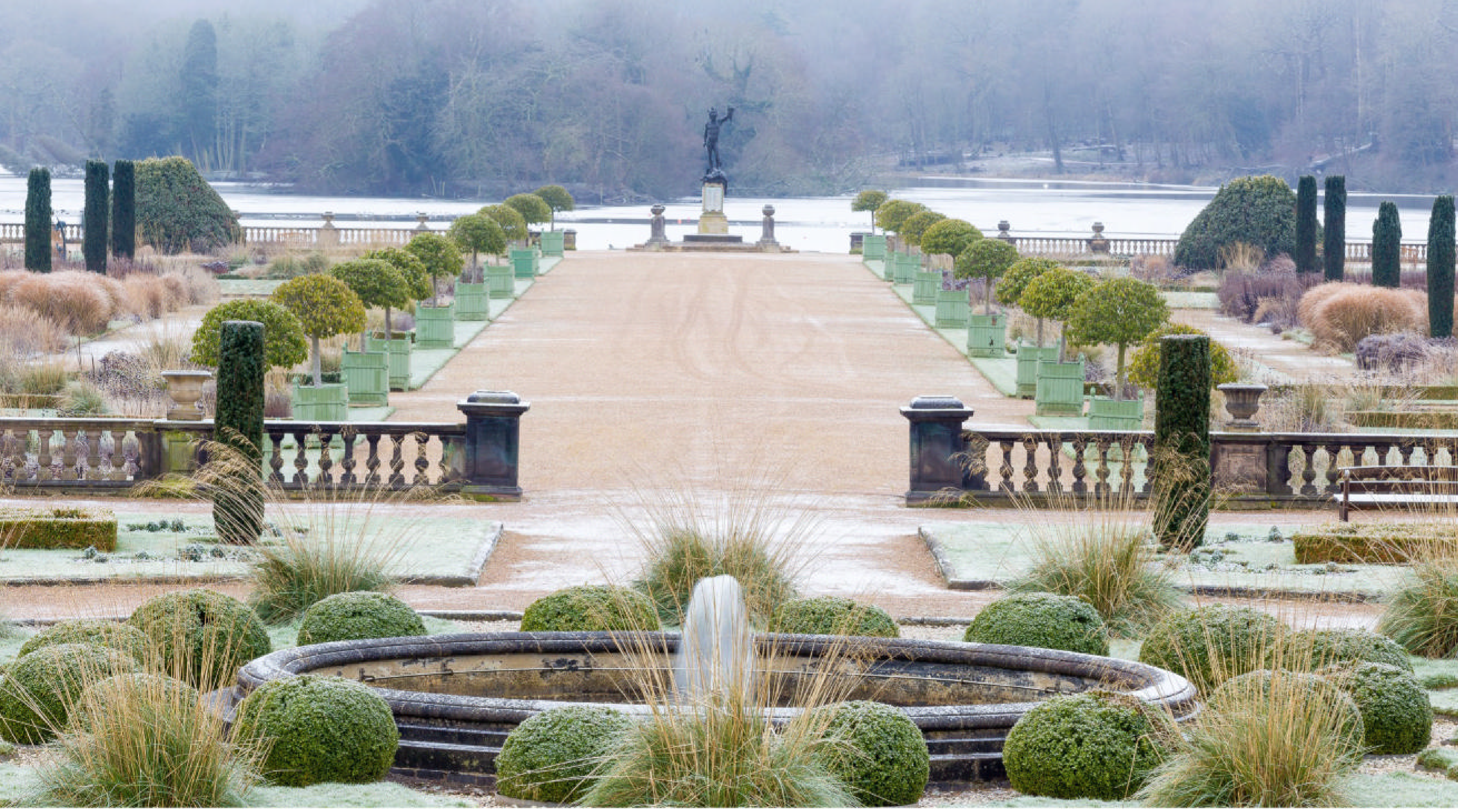
Stourhead, Wiltshire

Designed by Henry Hoare in the 1740s, the mesmerising landscape of Stourhead is centred around its magnificent manmade lake, which is framed on all sides by classically inspired temples, palladian bridges and magical grottoes. On a frosty or snowy winter's morning, caught in its true winter glory, the panorama resembles a scene out of Narnia, with grand old trees and dusted evergreens seemingly suspended in time. Open daily, 9.30am-3.30pm. Tel: 01747 841152; nationaltrust.org.uk

RHS Wisley, Woking, Surrey

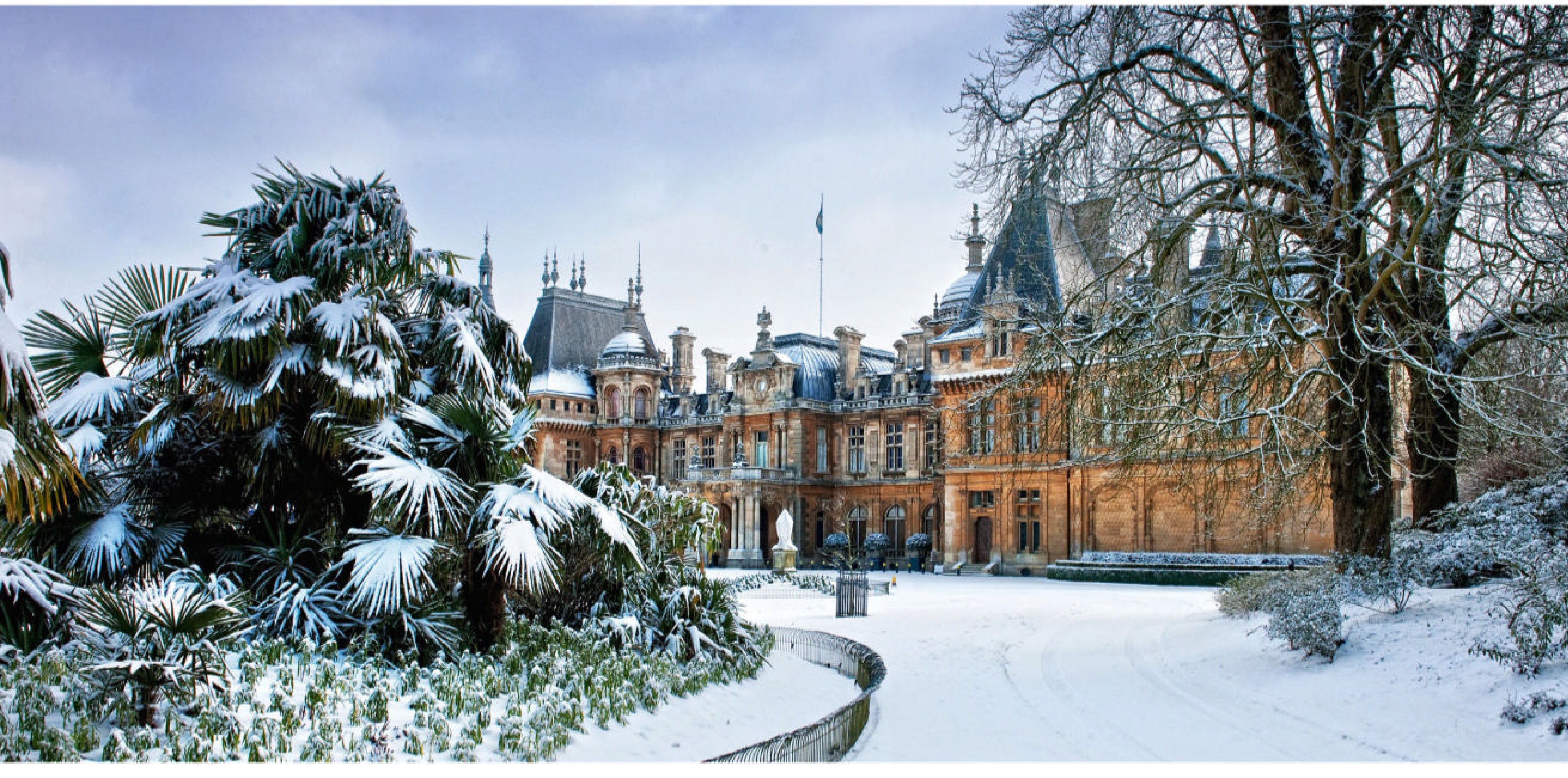
A lesson in how to create a winter garden, the deep borders brim with ever-changing interest in the flagship garden of the Royal Horticultural Society. The Winter Walk presents a dazzling display of rainbow-coloured winter stems, the low sun filters through the prairie-style glasshouse borders, and dramatic drifts of hamamelis, snowdrops and paperbush make an impactful sight. Open daily, 10am-6pm (from 9am at weekends) Tel: 0845 260 9000; rhs.org.uk ➤

Images (Stourhead) Getty Images/Anthony Spencer; (Wisley) RHS/ Joanna Kossak



Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire

The vast perennial plantings at Trentham, including more than 80,000 in the restored 19th-century Italian Garden designed by Tom Stuart-Smith, take on an ethereal beauty in winter. Crisp seedheads and defoliated stems stand out against the formal structure of carefully clipped topiary and swathes of grass, creating a lovely spectacle. With 300 acres of landscaped parkland, gardens and woodland, there is much to enjoy and explore. Open daily, 9am-3pm.Tel: 01782 646646; trentham.co.uk



Waddesdon, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire

Created at the end of the 19th century, the gardens at Waddesdon were the vision of owner Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, who wanted his guests to delight in the surroundings of the French Renaissance-style château. As the gardens go to sleep in winter, the stark beauty of the landscape can be appreciated, with hollies and evergreen shrubs coming to the fore, and late-flowering plants continuing the colour. Open Wednesday to Sunday, 10am-5pm. Tel: 01296 820414; waddesdon.org.uk

Image (Waddesdon)
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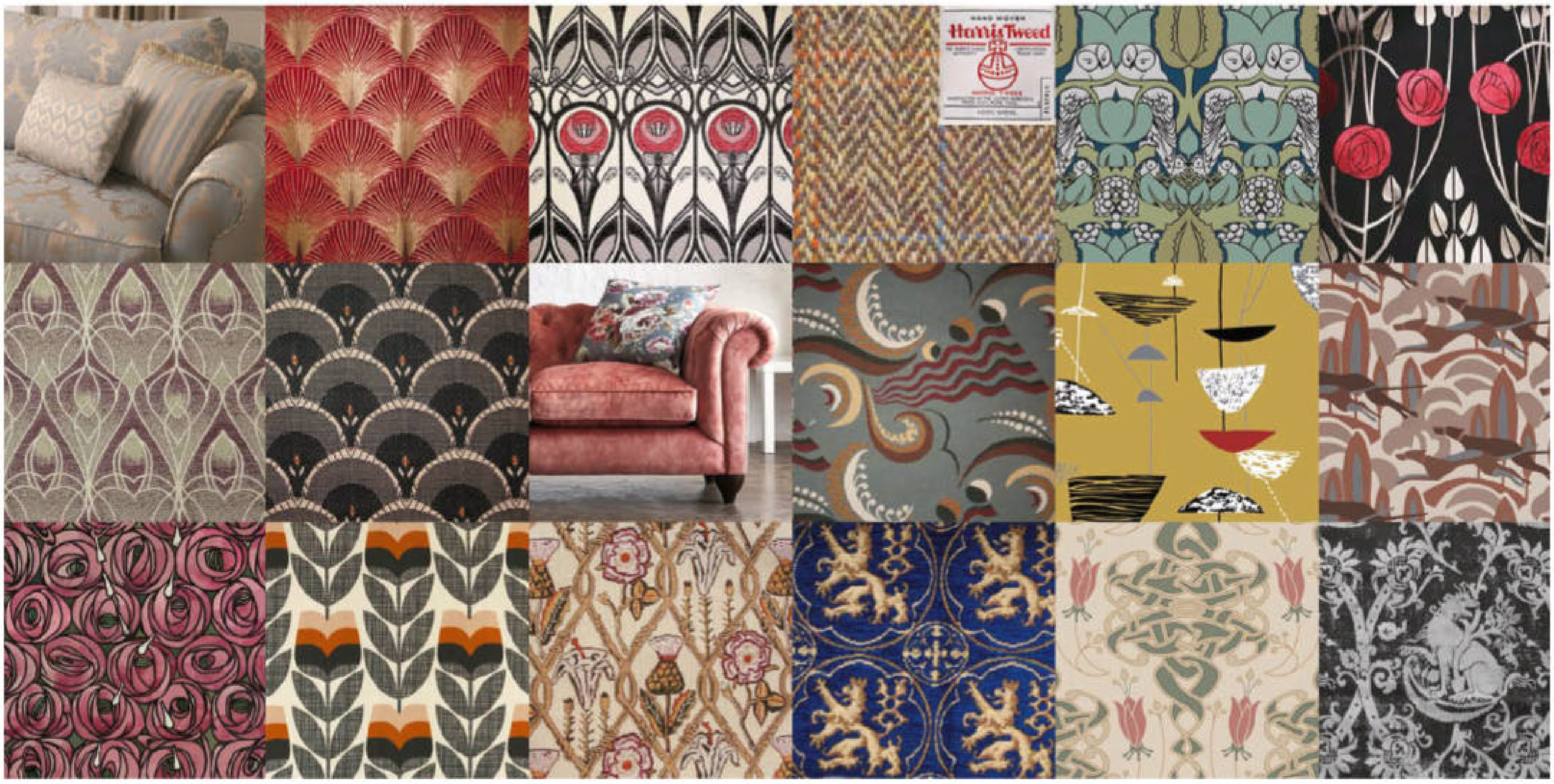

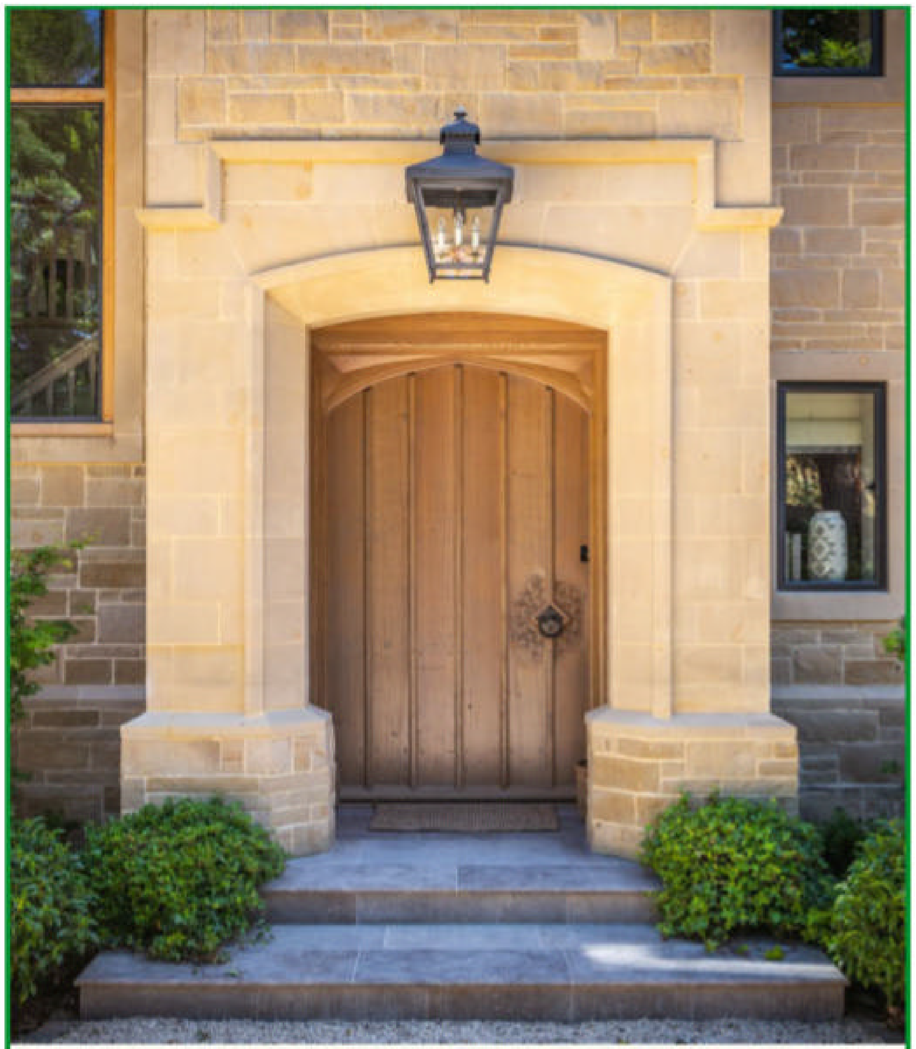

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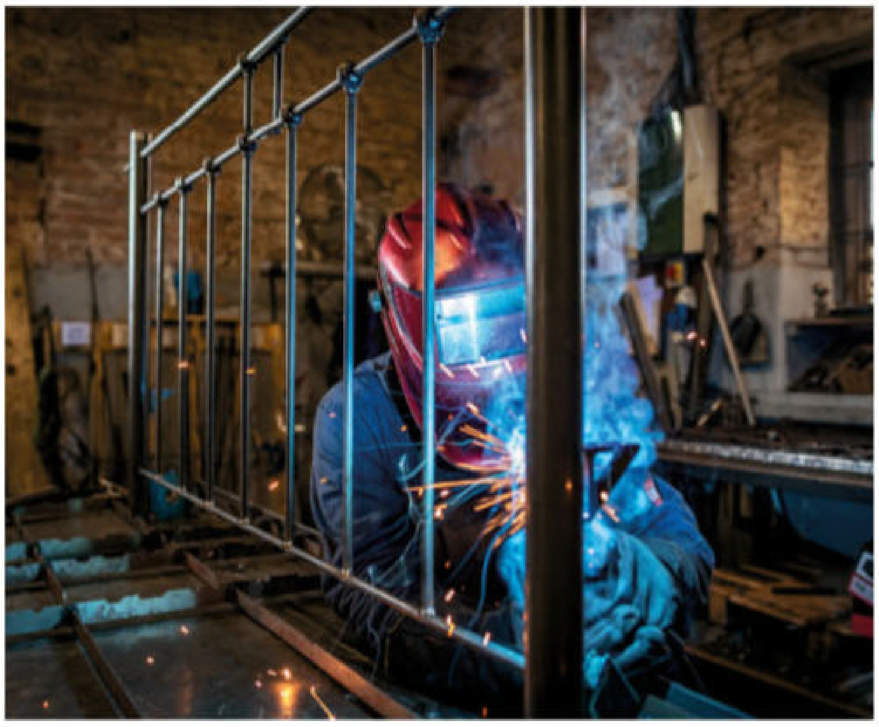

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EVENTS

Malvern Flea & Collectors Fair
Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire, WR13 6NW.

Sunday 16th January
Sunday 13th February

Entrance:
7.30am-3.30pm
- £5

Detling Antiques, Vintage & Collectors Fair
Kent County Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF.

Sat 22nd - Sun 23rd January

Entrance:
Sat: Early Entry 8.30am - £6
Sat: Entry 10am - 4.30pm - £5
Sun: 10am - 3.30pm - £4

Edinburgh Antiques, Vintage & Collectors Fair
Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, EH28 8NB.

Sat 19th - Sun 20th February

Entrance:
Sat: Early: 8.15am - £6
Sat: General: 10am - 4.30pm - £5
Sun: 10am - 3.30pm - £4
Royal Highland Centre £5 vehicle car parking charge.

Malvern Antiques & Collectors Fair
The Severn Hall, Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcs, WR13 6NW.

Sunday 27th March

Antiques, Art Deco, collectables & much more

Early Entrance: 8.30am - £4 | **Entrance:** 10am-4pm - £3

Please check www.b2bevents.info in case dates have changed or been cancelled

B2B EVENTS

Tel: 01636 676 531
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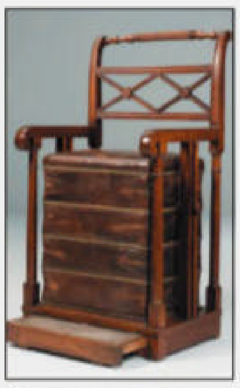

Labelled/ stamped branded furniture from Georgian to Victorian, eg Thomas Butler, Morgan & Sanders, J Alderman, Ross of Dublin (pictured), Gregory Kane, Wilkinson of Ludgate Hill, Robert James of Bristol, James Winter, W Priest, Samuel Pratt and many others. Tables all types, chairs, bookcases, , Davenport. mirrors etc. Campaign shower.

Georgian chamber horse exercise chair (pictured)

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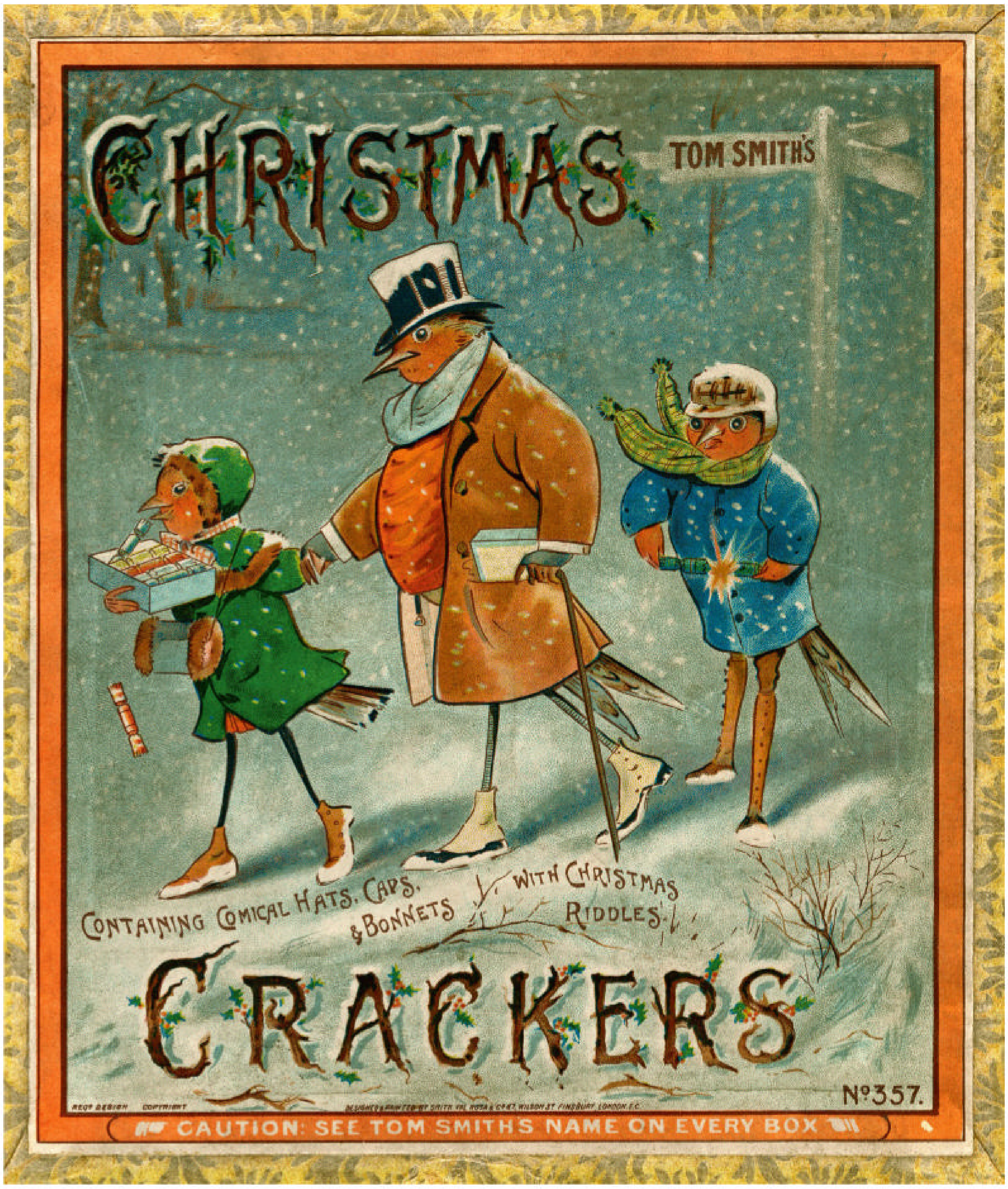
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Tiny gifts & coronets

How the cracker exploded onto the Christmas party scene in Victorian times and has been a big noise ever since

Christmas lunch isn't complete without an enticing cracker at every place setting. Packed with the obligatory paper hat, random gift, predictable joke and very unpredictable snap, Christmas crackers are so much part of our current festive tablescapes that it's easy to assume they were a relatively modern invention. Yet the Christmas cracker has been around for more than 170 years, since Queen Victoria was on the throne.

Baker and confectioner Tom Smith was inspired by the twist-wrapped sugared almonds he'd seen on a trip to Paris and decided to replicate the idea in his London shop. He took his sweets a step further with a love motto inside the wrapping, then, in 1847, patented an additional surprise – the audible crack that gave them their name. The inspiration for the sound was said to be the crackling of a winter fire, and Smith's cracker snap used friction to create a mini explosion. The sweets were replaced by trinkets, toys and jewellery, and the packaging became ever more flamboyant (pictured is a box lid from 1870-90). When Tom Smith's sons took over the business in 1880 they added paper hats and sourced gifts from all over the globe.

Making crackers became big business and a decade later the London firm was employing 2,000 people. Tom Smith was granted its first royal warrant in 1906 and the brand is still the official supplier of Christmas crackers to the Royal Household. Whether Prince Charles wears his paper crown, and what's inside the royal crackers remain closely guarded secrets, but we bet there aren't any fortune-telling fish.

Words Karen Darlow Image of Victorian cracker box, Alamy

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